

This morning, I am in the eighth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "Meeting Jesus." I am making my way through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. This morning, we are going to be in Luke 5:33 – 6:11, looking at Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees over the relationship of the follower of God to the law and spiritual practices.

Luke 5:33–6:11 - They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."³⁴ Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?³⁵ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."³⁶ He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will **not match the old**."³⁷ And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.³⁸ No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.³⁹ And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'" 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.² Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is **unlawful on the Sabbath?**"³ Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?⁴ 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."⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."⁶ On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose **right hand was shriveled**.⁷ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.⁸ But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.⁹ Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"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.¹¹ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Three things we learn from this passage about the relationship of the believer to the law and spiritual practices:

1) The gospel of grace is not traditional religion

What do I mean by that? The Pharisees represented the traditional religion of the day, but Jesus came proclaiming and living something distinctly different, and it led to repeated clashes and eventually to Jesus' death. Go back to the beginning of the passage:

Luke 5:33-35 - They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."³⁴ Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?³⁵ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

The passage begins with people questioning why Jesus and his disciples don't fast. By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were teaching that godly people should fast every Monday and Thursday as a sign of devotion to God, mourning for their sin and captivity to Rome and pleading for God's deliverance. And so they question Jesus as to why his disciples don't fast. They are obviously comparing their level of spirituality and commitment to God to that of Jesus' followers, and are not impressed by the level of Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus tells them that what they have been fasting and praying for is now here; he is the Messiah, the metaphorical groom to the bride of God's people, and he has come to save them. In his analogy, the groomsmen don't fast when they are with the bridegroom; it is the time for celebration. And so now is the time for rejoicing, not mourning, for He has come to deliver them. Soon He will be taken away. He will be arrested and crucified and return to heaven. And then they will mourn again. But now is the time for rejoicing, not fasting and mourning.

Jesus goes on to make an analogy:

Luke 5:36-39 - He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will **not match the old**."³⁷ And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.³⁸ No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.³⁹ And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"

If you don't understand the analogy: wineskins were made from sheepskin or goatskin, and the neck area became the neck for the container. Over time, the skin

became brittle. If new wine was added to an old wine skin, then when the new wine fermented, it expanded the container and the skin burst, and the new wine was ruined along with the old wine skin. Jesus is saying that He is like the new garment or the new wine. And the message He has come to proclaim will not fit in traditional religion. His gospel will not fit into the old paradigm. If you try, you'll ruin both. Even though there are some similarities between what the Pharisees are teaching and what Jesus is proclaiming, the gospel of Jesus is also fundamentally a different approach to God than the religion of the Pharisees. It is a gospel of grace, not law; it is about being right with God on the basis of Jesus' death on the cross for our sins, not by the good works we do.

The religion of the Pharisees, and most religion today, says "impress God by your piety and devotion." It is the belief that God will reward you for your church attendance and fasting and giving and all the other good works you do. But Jesus says "salvation is by grace, the undeserved gift of God." It's not by works.

Ephesians 2:8–9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Romans 3:19–24 - Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. ²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ **to all who believe**. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Faith and works can not be mixed when it comes to our salvation. It can't be Jesus plus anything else – circumcision, baptism, speaking in tongues, tithing – to earn salvation. Jesus is doing a new thing, and the gospel of grace is not like traditional religion.

2) The law and spiritual practices were given to be our servant, not our master

Luke 6:1-5 - 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. ² Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” ³ Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ 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.” ⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

In the next encounter, we move on from the spiritual practice of fasting to the practice of the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, God gave Israel the Sabbath as a day to rest from labor and to worship and enjoy their relationship with Him. But the Pharisees, in order to clarify for the people what it meant to rest from labor, had added 39 activities you could not do on the Sabbath, including reaping grain, just to make sure no one came close to breaking the Sabbath. In Jesus’ case, the Pharisees argued that plucking and rubbing was the same as harvesting and threshing, and so they were guilty of breaking the law. But Jesus replies by referencing an event from King David’s life, when he and his companions ate some of the consecrated bread, which was only for the priests. Jesus makes two points here: firstly, that the Sabbath is not to be a master over God’s people but a service to them. It was created for them and not as a burden against them. And secondly, Jesus claims that He has authority over the Sabbath, something he proves in the final encounter we will look at this morning:

Luke 6:6-10 - On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. ⁷ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. ⁸ But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” **So he got up and stood there.** ⁹ Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?” 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.

On the Sabbath, healing or medical work was not to be done unless a life was in danger, a baby was being born, or a circumcision needed to be performed. But Jesus tells them that the Sabbath is all about healing and restoring, and so what Jesus does is right and heals the man.

What does this fundamental shift mean for our relationship to God’s law and spiritual practices such as fasting and the Sabbath? Notice that Jesus does not do away with them, but changes our relationship to them. They are not laws given to

be our master, things we must observe in order to be accepted by God or impress Him or earn salvation. No – we are already accepted by God because of Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins. We are perfect in His sight because of our trust in Jesus. And so we do not fast or observe the Sabbath or read the Bible or pray or give or do any number of other things in order to impress God or earn His favor. **Instead, we see them as practices and laws that will help us become the people God has created to be, people who break free of sin and self-centeredness and grow in our holiness and Christlikeness.** Very timely with this season being Lent for Christians and Ramadan for Muslims. For all the people who are fasting or observing holy days during this season, the question remains: why are you doing it? What is the heart of it? What is the purpose?

The law and spiritual practices were given to us to be our servant, not our master. **You know that you get this concept when duty becomes a delight.** Tim Keller gives the example of listening to Beethoven to get a good grade in music appreciation class. But now he listens to it because he enjoys listening to Beethoven. Duty has become delight.

Or think of learning a foreign language. When you were a student, you may have studied Spanish or French begrudgingly, in order to earn a grade and get through school. But most of us as adults stopped studying. But if you fell in love with someone who spoke another language, you would learn it with enthusiasm so that you might better know and communicate with the one you love. That is the gospel. That is how Jesus has transformed the law and spiritual practices. When you come to know God, they are changed from a duty to a delight, to the means by which we get to know and communicate with the one we love.

We follow God’s laws and observe spiritual practices not because we have to or because we think it will impress God, **but because we realize they are all gifts given for our good**, and to deny them is to do harm to ourselves and to others.

Psalm 19:7–9 - The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

The gospel of grace means that you do not have to be here. God is not taking attendance. It means you do not have to serve. You do not have to give. I hope you come to church because you want to, not because you have to! I hope you serve

because you want to, not because you have to. I hope you give because you want to, not because you have to. **This is not a religion; this is a relationship with the God of the universe.** Come because you love God and need the fellowship of other believers. Serve because God has gifted you with talents and abilities and resources that can bless others and bring you deep purpose and satisfaction in life. Give because God has given generously to you and by your generosity you can be a part of transforming lives and this world. As Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 9:6–8 - Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Serve because it is a privilege to be a part of what God is doing in this world. Serve because there is nothing greater than knowing that God is using you to change the hearts of men and women and lead them closer to Him. Come to church because this is your family, and your God has come to meet with you. **Not because you have to, but because you GET to.** Because it is such a privilege to be an adopted child of the God of the universe. Follow God’s laws because you trust that they are for your good! Listen to James:

James 1:23–25 - Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

The perfect law that gives freedom.

Let’s look a little more closely at these two gifts, these two spiritual practices God has given us: fasting and the Sabbath. Consider fasting. Fasting is to go without food for a specific time period in order to seek God more fervently. We do not have to fast. It will not earn us anything with regards to our salvation. If you eat meat on Friday during Lent, you will not go to Hell. But we will find tremendous benefit by fasting. It is not about punishing ourselves but about denying ourselves worldly pleasures in order to more fervently pursue that which will truly fill us up, God Himself. As Jesus said to his disciples after his interaction with the woman at the well, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about... My

food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (**John 4:32,34**). Fasting is a gift given to us in order to give us spiritual power to break our attachments to the things of this world, our slavery to our appetites. And it is about connecting with God on a deeper level, going after Him with a deeper desperation, that we might experience more of His presence and power in our lives. As God said to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, “Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (**Jeremiah 29:12-13**). And as Tony Evans put it, “Fasting helps us to activate God’s power to break through that wall and all that stands between you and God’s plan, purpose and power for your life and world.” Fasting is a good gift, given to us to serve us.

And consider the Sabbath. It is a day of no work. Sabbath means “ceasing or stopping.” It was given as one of the ten commandments:

Exodus 20:8–11 - “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

The Sabbath is a day to rest from your work, to remember that there is a God who cares for you, that not everything depends upon you working. It is a day to take part in things that restore your soul. Feasting and singing and being in nature or spending time alone, enjoying time with family or friends, delighting in the good gifts that God has given His people. It is incredible to think that God commanded us to rest. And it is **a day of worship**, a holy day, a day to gather with our brothers and sisters to encourage each other and praise God, a regular reminder that our life and strength come from God. Once again, do you have to do it? Will you go to hell if you don’t observe the Sabbath? No. Consider:

Romans 14:5–6 - One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.

Colossians 2:16–17 - Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath

day.¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The Sabbath is a gift from God to serve us. You can choose to reject the gift at your own peril, to work until exhaustion and take the burdens of the world on your shoulders, or you can receive it and enjoy it and find rest for your soul. But the reality, as Paul tells us in Colossians, is found in Jesus.

3) The deeper rest is found in the gospel.

Luke 6:11 - But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

The passage ends with the religious leaders beginning already to scheme against Jesus, which will ultimately end in a plot to kill him. But Jesus was dying for our sins, in our place, out of love for us, to restore us to God. And the Sabbath rest points us to the deeper rest that is found in the gospel, which makes sense of this tension between Jesus and the Pharisees in Luke 5&6:

Hebrews 4:9–11 - There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

There is a Sabbath-rest available to everyone that is not about taking one day off in the week. There is a deeper rest for your soul to which the Sabbath points, and when you enter that rest, you rest from your works, from striving, from justifying yourself, from trying to prove that you're enough. How do you enter that rest?

Hebrews 4:1-3 - Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.² For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.³ **Now we who have believed enter that rest.**

We who believe in Jesus enter into the deeper rest to which the Sabbath points. As Paul wrote:

Romans 4:4–5 - Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Do you understand what I am saying, what Paul is saying? So many of us are working, producing, doing things in an attempt to earn something, prove something, justify something about ourselves – that we are good, that our lives have significance, that we will be safe and secure, that we matter. But there is a way to escape from all of that striving and chasing. There is a deeper rest for your soul that comes through faith in Jesus and resting in His finished work for you.

Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

In fact, after Jesus' resurrection, the early Christians changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the last day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week, and called it "The Lord's Day." Whereas the Sabbath was a way to end the week with a day of rest after six days of working, following the pattern of creation, now the week would begin with the day of rest. The week would begin with resting in God, trusting in Him, worshipping Him, being filled up by Him and strengthened by Him before going out to work for the week. In this way, the Lord's Day would become a reflection of the gospel of God's grace – the pattern was not work and then rest, but to first rest in His grace and then work in response to His grace, to work in the strength He gives.

And so, in the end, the whole idea of the Sabbath is not primarily about taking a day off to rest and worship. After all, what good is it to take a day off but trust in your own labors the rest of the week? What good is it to stop working while being anxious about not working the whole day? The Sabbath is meant to point to the deeper rest that we can have in Christ, so that even when we are working, we are doing so while trusting in God as our Savior, sustainer, and provider. And when we do rest, we can leave our anxieties in God's capable hands, for He cares for us. We are not working to justify our existence or prove we are enough. We are working out of the deep knowledge that we have been saved, justified, declared enough by Jesus and His death on the cross for us.

Most of us, I believe, need to be encouraged to find ways to regularly rest, delight, and worship. Not everyone can do it on Sunday. Sunday is not a day of rest for me. Not everyone may be able to take a whole day. But what can you do to increase rest and worship in your life? Can you take time from sundown to sundown, or morning to sundown, to unplug, to put away your phone, to not check your work, to focus on people, to sleep, to play games with family, to eat good food, to go for a walk, to spend time alone, to do something that would recharge your soul and allow you to delight in God's good gifts to you?

The gospel of grace is not traditional religion, and the law and spiritual practices were given to us to be our servant, not our master. Let me close with an invitation from Jesus:

Matthew 11:28–29 - “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”