

The Lord of the Sabbath

Luke 6:1-11

INTRODUCTION: One of the often overlooked aspects of preaching the Bible is that the point is not simply to teach you what the Bible says and means. That is important, but perhaps the most important aspect of good preaching is to show the people **HOW to approach the Bible, HOW** to read it, **HOW** to study it. Then when the preacher is in glory, they can continue to mine the truth out of the text. Some texts are very helpful in this regard. Today's text is one of the most helpful.

CONTEXT: Remember that as the followers of Jesus have grown so have the critics. The Pharisees in Jerusalem have heard the reports of Jesus's teaching and miracles and they have sent investigators to watch him and see if they have need to be concerned. That's where we pick up...

TEXT: Luke 6:1–11 (ESV)

¹ 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?"

- On a Sabbath..

Sabbath or Shabat, refers to the 7th day of the week. In our calendar that would be Saturday. On Saturday, the Sabbath, the Hebrews were to take a day off and focus on community with one another in the Synagogue, and worship of the Creator.

Sabbath worship was one of the most fundamental and normative aspects of Jewish worship. Other expressions of worship were annual, some monthly, but Sabbath was weekly. Some expressions of worship were limited to the priests while Sabbath was a ceremony every single Jew was to participate in.

Sabbath, like our Lord's Day - was rooted in two historical events:

1. **Creation - Exodus 20:11** For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
2. **The Exodus from Egypt - Deuteronomy 5:15 (ESV)**
¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

In the same way, after the resurrection of Jesus, every single account of corporate worship we see takes place on the Lord's day, Sunday, the first day of the week. What would cause these faithful Jews who believed in the Messiah to shift the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday? **Because a greater and more significant historic event took place**, not on the Sabbath, but on the first day of the week.

LISTEN: More significant than creation itself. More significant than the deliverance from Egypt. Namely, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the day of rest shifted to Sunday from Saturday.

But what we are reading in Luke happened before the resurrection. So remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy was a big deal. In fact, a particular strain of Judaism had given itself to determining what exactly was lawful or unlawful on the Sabbath. That in itself is a problem.

Righteousness is a narrow path with a deep ditch on either side.

- On the left is the ditch of **liberalism** - that is reducing the truth of God's word.
- On the right is the ditch of **legalism** - that is adding to God's word.

Both are incredibly dangerous - the great danger of

- **Liberalism** is that you only believe those portions of the Bible that you have deemed appropriate, thus making you the ultimate arbiter of truth.
- **Legalism** is similar. This is when you add to God's word the things you think He missed, also making yourself out to be God and placing your perspective on par with God's law.

The Pharisees were professional legalists. They loved to add to the Word of God.

The **Talmud** (*which is basically a commentary on the OT law*) devotes twenty-four chapters to Sabbath regulations, describing in painfully exhaustive detail what was and was not permitted to be done.

For example,

- traveling more than 2,000 steps from home was forbidden. [*Those of you who parked in the lower parking, are just going to have to stay at church.*] Unless! You place a meal at the 2,000 step mark, then you get an additional 2,000 steps to travel. OR, if you thought ahead enough to place a piece of wood or a rope at the end of a narrow street or alley... which would constitute a doorway. That could then be considered the front door of one's house, and permit the 2,000 steps of travel to begin there.
- An object tossed into the air could be caught with the same hand, but if it was caught with the other hand, it would be a Sabbath violation.

- It was forbidden to carry anything heavier than a dried fig (though something weighing half as much could be carried two times).
- A tailor could not carry his needle, a scribe his pen, or a student his books. Only enough ink to write two letters (of the alphabet) could be carried. A letter could not be sent, not even with a non-Jew.
- No fire could be lit, or put out.
- Cold water could be poured into warm water, but not warm into cold.
- Bathing was forbidden, lest water be spilled on the floor and wash it.
- Moving a chair was not allowed, since it might make a rut in a dirt floor, which was too much like plowing.
- This is my favorite...women were forbidden to look in a mirror, since if they saw a white hair, they might be tempted to pull it out. *[That was before they knew that for every grey hair you pull out, two grow back...]*

ILLUSTRATION: Many of you know that when we travel to Israel there are Sabbath elevators. On the Sabbath they stop on every floor so the faithful Jew will not have to push a button, thus work. Adjacent to the Sabbath elevator is a Gentile elevator. We may push a button and go directly to the floor of our choosing. We began to notice that when we went on the Gentile elevator, Jewish people would hop on and ask us to push the button for them.... guess they figured, “you guys are going to hell anyway... what difference does it make”?

It wasn't supposed to be that way. The Sabbath was a gift! Like God saying, “Hey I love you, I want to hang out with you - enjoy a day off!” When you add rules to a gift, you ruin the gift.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember when I was 8 years old, my dad bought me a 4-wheeler for Christmas. I should have been happy, but I wasn't. Because, I knew anything that big and that fast would come with a LOT of rules...how I could ride, where I could ride, how fast I could ride. And frankly, it didn't sound like fun.

ALL OF THESE SILLY ADD ONS DEVELOPED BY THE PHARISEES, MADE SABBATH ONE OF THE MOST LABORIOUS DAYS OF THE WEEK.

AND, just in case you weren't sure if you were breaking the Sabbath or not, remember, these Pharisees found it perfectly permissible for them to walk around and police Sabbath compliance. Then we are told that the disciples...

- while he was going through the grainfields

That was the first problem. Because most likely that was further than the allowed 2,000 steps they were allowed to travel. But one must also recognize that the **Pharisees were here as well**. Thus, it seems fair to say they too had violated this rule.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember in preschool at Moulton Baptist Church, when time came for us to pray we were to bow our heads and close our eyes. As soon as the director said, “amen”, Elizabeth Marsh raised her hand and tattled on a friend of mine. She said that Brock Nix was not closing his eyes during the prayer...to which I quickly retorted, “How the heck do you know?” She said, “Because I saw him”. We learn legalism early...

- This happened a few times with the Pharisees. Remember the woman, “caught in adultery... in the very act”? Well if they caught her in the very act, where was the man? Sometimes our complaints about the sins of others can be awfully convenient.

Then it says...they

- plucked grain, rubbed it together, and ate it...

All three of those things qualify as a violation of the Sabbath rules. They picked grain...that’s harvesting. They rubbed it together...that’s thrashing. Then, finally, they ate prepared food. The Pharisees declare that this is...

- Not lawful to do on the Sabbath...

Now that statement is insightful. You see nothing they had done actually broke the LAW of GOD. It broke the law of the Pharisees. **What Jesus did next was one of the most significant concepts in all the NT.**

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?”

- **DAVID AND THE SHEWBREAD** - Jesus is referring to an incident in **1 Samuel 21**. David had been anointed King by Samuel the Prophet. Samuel had taken a message from God to Saul telling him that the Kingdom had been removed from him. He should have stepped down and complied with the revealed will of God. Instead, he seeks to kill David.

David and his men flee from Saul. They had very few weapons, and they were out of provisions. One of the most important factors in any military conflict is FOOD. No weapon is great enough to overcome the need people have to eat.

David knows that God has called him to be King. Now he is fleeing for his life.

Imagine all that's going through his mind. If God called me, shouldn't this be easier? Where should he go? To whom should he turn?

Well, he turned to the one who called him. He went to the tabernacle. The priest there greeted David. The priest would have known that the prophet, Samuel, had anointed David king. David tells the priest, we have no provisions, we are fleeing for our lives and waiting for the Lord to deliver us. Then he asked, "Do you have any bread?"

The priest told David, we have bread - 12 loaves, but it is the bread of Presence, the shewbread. This was fresh bread that was set before the Ark of the Covenant and replaced weekly. The law saw that the Priest could eat the bread as long as they were holy before the Lord.

So the priest is in a dilemma. The bread is for the Holy Priest. But here before him is God's anointed King. Should he give David the shewbread or not?

He asks David, "Have you and your men remained pure and kept yourselves from women?" David answered, "yes, we love the Lord, we have remained pure", and the priest decides to give David and his men the shewbread.

They continue. Their journey and God's will is accomplished.

The point Jesus is making - the law concerning bread is important. But that appointing of David as King of Israel is more important. One law is GREATER than the other.

Then notice what Jesus says...

⁵ And he said to them, "[The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.](#)"

That was one of many **mic drop** moments in the book of Luke.

In other words, ***if Jesus says it's ok to pick grain on the Sabbath, it's ok to pick grain on the Sabbath. Game over. Case closed.***

NOW - this text raises a point beyond what is permissible on the Sabbath and I want us to talk about it.. because it is one of the BIGGEST misunderstandings regarding sin both inside and outside the church. ***NAMELY - ARE ALL SINS EQUAL?***

ILLUSTRATION: I can't tell you how many times I've preached against a particular sin and someone pushes back and says, well a sin is a sin... all sin is the same. What makes you think their sin is worse than your sin?

This text gives us an opportunity to unpack that question. To do so, **I want to give you 8 THESIS points.**

1. Some aspects of the Old Testament Law were Ceremonial. Those were fulfilled in Jesus and no longer in effect.

- **The OT Law was divided into various categories** - MORAL, DIETARY, CEREMONIAL. The moral law of God is still in effect for everyone. The dietary law remains for Israel, the ceremonial law is now obsolete and no longer in effect. It has been rescinded by Jesus.
- **Case in point-Sabbath.** This is why Christians no longer practice Saturday Sabbath. Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath law, and according to Hebrews produced a true and better REST for us. He has done the work of redemption and now is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Thus Paul writes, **Colossians 2:16–17 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ ***These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.***

So everything they were pointing to has come in Jesus Christ. So we no longer need the shadow - we have the substance.

2. In terms of salvation, any sin separates us from God. Thus they are equal in terms of redemption.

This is what James means in **James 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

James argues that we are all sinners in need of a redeeming Savior. So, it doesn't matter if you only commit one little sin. Let's say you exaggerated and stretched the truth. Well we are told to speak as the oracle of God, the truth doesn't stretch, it breaks. The same God who said, "thou shall not bear false witness" said, "thou shall not murder". So even though your sin was small, the sort a child might commit, it was a breaking of God's law. So you are guilty as a transgressor and in need of a Savior.

But James is not saying that all sins are equal, he is in fact acknowledging that they are not. His point is that even little sins require the sacrifice of Jesus.

This is also what Jesus had in mind when he said,
Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ ***But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***

3. There are greater and lesser commands and sins in the Scripture

A lawyer approaches Jesus and asks, “Rabbi, what is the **greatest** commandment?” Do you remember what Jesus said? He didn’t say, “thou fool, they are all the same of equal importance”. Jesus answered and said, “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. The second is like unto it, “love your neighbor as yourself”. On these two commandments, depend the whole Law and the Prophets”.

So Jesus is saying - those two are the *greatest*, the weightiest, the ones that take precedent.

Now, if one law can be greater than the other, so could one sin. If loving God with all your heart is the greatest law, what is the greatest sin? To love anything else more than God. That is called idolatry in scripture.

In another place he says, “You tithe from your spice rack, that you should do, but **neglect the weightier portions**”.

4. There are occasions when two commands will be in conflict with one another. In such cases we are to choose the weightier command.

SABBATH AND CIRCUMCISION - In John 7:22–23 we see an occasion Jesus says, (ESV) 22 Moses gave you circumcision, and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 23 If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man’s whole body well?

Do you see His point? The Law said a son is to be circumcised on the 8th day after his birth, but what if that 8th day falls on the Sabbath? The rabbis had determined that the covenant sign of circumcision was more consequential than obeying the Sabbath perfectly, thus they decided to do the circumcision.

5. There are different degrees of punishment which are attached to the various sins.

As you read the OT you will see that the consequences attached to commands differ:

- **Some sins are criminal and have judicial consequences** - Stealing for example is criminal and the state attaches consequences to that sin. To dishonor father and mother is a SIN but not a CRIME. You see the difference?

- **Different sacrifices were required for different sins** - Accidental or unintentional sins were treated differently than premeditated sins.
- **Willful sins of those who know better are worse than willful sins of the untaught.** - This is one of the reasons that scripture says, **“not many of you should be teachers, because such will incur a greater judgment”**. Why? We should know better.

When they took Jesus into custody and put him on trial in John 19:11 (ESV)
¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore **he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.**”

So the sin of Judas was greater than the sin of Pilate.

- **The sins of the initiator are worse than the sins of the accomplice**
Luke 17:1–2 (ESV) ¹ And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!”

6. The nature of the sin effects the gravity of the sin.

In other words, certain sins are more damaging to the person sinning than others.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

CASE STUDY: When a Christian says, “The Bible says homosexual sex is sin” and the unbeliever says, “yeah but the Bible also says not to weave two kinds of fabrics together... so there”.

Do you see how that is completely illogical? They have taken a ceremonial aspect of the law (which is no longer binding) and compared it to a moral aspect of the law which is binding.

They have taken a less weighty aspect of the law and compared it to a very weighty aspect of the law.

Hear the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs 6:30–33 (ESV).

³⁰ People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, ³¹ but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house. ³² He who commits adultery lacks sense; **he who does it destroys himself.** ³³ **He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away.**

Sexual sin is different. It is addictive. It is damaging. Flee from it.

7. The scope of the sin effects the gravity of the sin.

A lot of christians struggle with this one. They read..

Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)

[27. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.](#)

They say, well I’m already going to get charged for it, might as well commit adultery. It’s all the same apparently. That is not at all what Jesus is saying here. He is speaking in terms of redemption and telling us that just because you have not committed adultery you are innocent. He says, if you have desired it in your heart, you too stand in need of redemption.

Of course in the scope of effects **adultery is worse than lust.**

- Two people have committed sexual sin, which Paul says is unlike any other type of sin.
- Two families have been effected by the horror of infidelity.
- If you are caught, people will not look at you the same way.

So don’t fall into the trap of saying “well I’ve thought it, I may as well do it”.

8. All sin begins in the heart.

That was Jesus’s point in...

Matthew 18:8–9 (ESV)

[8. And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.](#) [9. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.](#)

What is the point? Ancient rabbis called the act of pleasuring oneself sexually, the sin of the right hand. Many believe this is what Jesus is referring to. So if that is the only sin that stands between you and Jesus... go to the root of the problem.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

- Cut off your hand... well let’s play that out. You do have another hand.. so cut it off too... but what would happen? You can still see attractive people.
- Gouge out your eye! But then what would happen? You remember what attractive people look like. How many of you know that blind people lust also?

- So where is the root of the problem? The HEART! So you must get rid of your heart and get a new one. That's the point Jesus is making.

LUKE 6

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.

Matthew tells us this was the straw that broke the camel's back... this is when they began to conspire with the Herodians to have Jesus crucified.