

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath

Luke 5:33-6:11

What comes to your mind when you read about the interaction between the Pharisees and Jesus in Luke 5:33-6:11? Conflict? Hypocrites? Persecution? What about hope? Joy? Freedom? Life? All of these things are in this passage. There is dance going on between Jesus and the Pharisees in this passage between fasting and feasting; destruction and delight; legalism and love; and malice and mercy. It is ultimately the conflict between life and death.

Here is my point: We are created to pursue our pleasure and rest in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But to support my point, I want to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. In the Garden, God created us to enjoy Him and after all He had created for us to enjoy with Him He gave us a whole day, called the Sabbath Day dedicated for rest, refreshment, and enjoyment of Him.

Then God's enemy, the serpent enters the scene. In the Garden, He questions and corrupts God's word. Adam and Eve listen to him and instead of life everlasting now death entered the world. Mankind can no longer enjoy the gifts of God as they were designed to be enjoyed because sin has entered the world and indeed has corrupted their hearts. Instead of loving life, man really clings to death.

But God did not leave us without hope. In Genesis 3, He promised to rescue us from the enemy, our sin, our death-loving selves, and an eternity in Hell for the consequences of our sin. He sent Jesus.

What we see in Luke 5:33-6:11 is not only the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees but the age-old conflict between the serpent who loves death and destruction of all that God created and God, Himself who loves His people and loves to give them life and enjoyment of His gifts and Himself.

So, when you read this conflict you see these three areas of conflict. First, there is the age-old conflict between Jesus and the serpent in the Garden. Jesus is the Genesis 3-Rescuer that God promised to send. He is the One who has come to set those free who have been in captivity since the Garden. We need to understand that Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees is the conflict that began in the Garden. Also it is not a dualistic conflict between two equal forces. Jesus is Lord and God. His word always accomplishes what He intends for it to accomplish.

Second, we need to see the text and the story it tells. Jesus' work to teach the truth, correct the Pharisees, and set real people free from the devastating effects of sin was with real people who needed to taste the rescuing-mercy of God.

Third, we need to apply this to our lives. We are the ones Jesus came to rescue and He is still rescuing His people from the ravages of sin today. Sin seeks to destroy our joy in Christ. The fact is sin seeks to short circuit our enjoyment of God. Sin promises more than it can deliver. Sin presents itself as the choice of pleasure but it is actually the loss of it. So, it is easy to see ourselves in lives of the disciples and the man with the withered hand and need to be rescued but we often fail to see that there is a self-righteous Pharisee that lurks within us all. Main Point: *Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath who came to give the joy of new life to His people by curing the Pharisee in us all.*

I. Fasting or Feasting (Luke 5:33-35)

- Verses 33-35:

- Verse 33a: *“they said to him”* – the table fellowship is still going on. Remember the Pharisees are upset that Jesus is hanging out with sinners. They did not object to Jesus going to parties, what they objected to was the guest list.
- Then in v. 33b: *they raised a question about fasting*: Their question was a backhanded way of pointing out the fact that Jesus was with people who did not measure up to their standards. The guest list was full of sinners. Their problem was that not only did Jesus associate with sinners but His disciples were sinners too because they did not fast nor were they very religious. The Pharisees looked down their noses at Jesus and His disciples as well as the guests at the party.
- But in vv. 34-35: Jesus turned the tables on them. The Pharisees were appealing to the outward expression of holiness as it was seen in asceticism (rigid and harsh spiritual disciplines).

For the Jews fasting was part of their religious experience. There were certain religious days that they were supposed to fast, however, the Pharisees went above and beyond what was customary. They invented regulations that they expected everyone to follow. Those who lived up to their traditions were considered holy and those who did not were sinners. It was a religious pecking order and they were at the top of the religious food chain.

However, Jesus burst their bubble. *Tradition held, you did not fast during weddings. So, Jesus took the opportunity again to assert His identity and authority.* Theologically, he poked them in the eye when he compared His presence among the Jews to Him being the Bridegroom and His disciples being His groomsmen.

Then in v. 35, He alluded to His death when He said *they will fast when the bridegroom is taken away from them.* We know from this side of the cross that Jesus was referring to His death on the cross. That would be a sad time for the disciples and it was common to fast during times of sadness.

- What do vv. 33-35 mean?
 - When the Pharisees heard Jesus refer to Himself as the bridegroom they knew He was again saying He was God. They knew from Old Testament that God called Himself Israel’s Bridegroom. In Isaiah 61:10, Isaiah says, *“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress . . .”*

Isaiah calls Yahweh a bridegroom who celebrates His marriage to His bride by covering her with new clothes that is a robe of righteousness. The wedding is supposed to be a time of feasting, not fasting.

II. Destruction or Delight (Luke 5:36-39)

- Look at what Jesus says in vv. 36-39. He picks up on the imagery of the wedding in Isaiah 61 because His parable is about new clothes and new wine.
- In v. 39, Jesus gives the interpretation: He exposed the hardness of their hearts and that they were going to reject Him as the Bridegroom, the new clothes of His righteousness and new wine of the New Covenant because they loved their traditions. In Luke 6:11 we see their response to Him, *“But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.”*
- Application:

1. Hospitality as a means of discipleship. One of the overarching applications is the process we see in Jesus table fellowship. He sat at the table with those who knew they were sinners and therefore unrighteous before God and with those who were self-righteous and therefore misunderstood God.
 - a. Jesus was gracious with sinners who needed to understand the grace of God and He was gracious with the self-righteous who needed to understand the grace of God. By being with them He was able to engage them. I am sure they talked about lots of things but He eventually turned the conversation to Himself.
 - b. What kind of conversations go on in your small groups and table fellowship groups? Do they eventually turn to the word of God? [Illst: the lady who witnessed to the server yesterday.]
2. Second application comes from v. 36. Do you wear a gospel-patch or gospel-clothing? Jesus is not a new patch you put on your old religion but a whole new suit of clothes. The Jews had to learn that you do not add Jesus to Judaism but the New Covenant is a whole new way to come to God. Yet, it is not only Judaism that had to learn that but over the years people have learned that Jesus is not an add on to Islam, Hinduism or any other religion. Likewise, you do not add Jesus to your own personalized approach to God. Jesus is not an add on to your own self-righteousness or your own personal principles or ethics to live by. Jesus will not share the throne of your heart with anyone or anything else. It is Jesus only.
3. This leads to my second question to help us make application. Is there a Pharisee lurking in your heart? In v. 39, Jesus goes for the heart in when he says “*no one . . . desires.*” The word *desire* is the language of the idols that rule our hearts. We must beware of the Pharisee in us all because we do what we do because we love what we love. What we love reveals our desires.

Our flesh comes wired to love works of righteousness. We come wired from the womb thinking we can make it on our own and we feel most comfortable in this system of works-based living. We like to know we have earned what we have been given. We like to know we deserve it. This is the old wine of life and we like to drink it. It makes us feel good. We really like to get drunk on it because when we have pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps we can feast at the table of pride and drink the wine of works of righteousness.
4. Finally, how does one come to *desire the new wine*? The heart must be changed.

III. Legalism or Love (Luke 6:1-5)

- Let’s make some observations from the text. Have you noticed how the Pharisees keep showing up? Of course, this is Luke’s way of telling the story but the truth is this was what was going on. These guys were just following Jesus around hoping He would slip up. We have an expression down south when about people like this. We say, “*He is like a bad penny, He keeps turning up.*” This is the Pharisees in these narratives.

They were in the house where the paralytic was healed, they were at Levi’s house for the feast, they pestered Jesus about fasting and now it seems they are following Him through the fields when the disciples picked the grain. I think I would have gotten frustrated with these guys. It seems Jesus could not get away from them. He goes to help someone and there they are. He goes to a party and there they are. He decides to go on a walk with His disciples and there they are.

So, Jesus and his disciples were walking through a field and some of them picked some heads of grain and rubbed them together in their hands to get the chaff off the seeds and then they pop them in

their mouths to eat. This would be the equivalent of popping sunflower seeds in your mouth, cracking them open with your teeth and spitting out the hull.

Well when this happened, the Pharisees sensed blood in the water and like a pack of sharks they moved in for the kill. They switched from questioning His authority to do certain things to appealing to the authority of Scripture and in particular, the authority of the Law of the Sabbath.

They accused His disciples of working on the Sabbath when they plucked some grain and ate it. The Law of the Sabbath rest goes all the way back to creation where on the seventh day God rested and made the Sabbath Day a holy day of rest. In Exodus 20:8-11, it is the fourth commandment. The Law of the Sabbath was strictly observed and to break the Law of the Sabbath by working on the Sabbath was punishable by death in ancient Israel.

The question was, how do they define *work on the Sabbath*? Because it was such a serious law to break, the religious leaders began to define what it meant to work on the Sabbath. According to the Jewish Mishnah¹ there were no fewer than thirty-nine different kinds of work that were forbidden on the Sabbath. For example, you could not walk too far or it was considered work. You would not cook on the Sabbath or it was considered work. You could not light a fire on the Sabbath or it was considered work. They added so many definitions to what it meant to work on the Sabbath that before long it was almost impossible to survive on the Sabbath much less work. The problem was that these rules were their own made up ethics and regulations and not God's law. The Pharisees were always telling people what they could do and what they could not do. They were legalists and as a result they weighed the people down with all kinds of extrabiblical regulations for the Sabbath.

That is the reason the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of working on the Sabbath in v. 2, when they ate some grain as they walked through the field. According to the Pharisees rules, the disciples had broken the Law of the Sabbath. The Pharisees were looking for Scriptural authority to accuse Jesus.

However, in vv. 3-4, Jesus answered their Scriptural objection with Scripture and reminded them of 1 Samuel 21 when David and his men entered temple and ate the Bread of Presence, which was unlawful for them to eat. They were starving and it was better to eat and live than die.

Jesus concluded his reply from the authority of Scripture in v. 5, by again asserting His authority that is on the level with Scripture. He said to them, "*The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.*"

- What does Jesus mean when He says He is *Lord of the Sabbath*? Well the Pharisees thought they owned the Sabbath because they told people what to do and what not to do on the Sabbath. Jesus let them know that the Sabbath belongs to Him. He is the Lord of the Law of the Sabbath. Jesus is saying that He is God. He is saying that He created the Sabbath, He created the Law of the Sabbath so therefore He is Lord of the Sabbath.

In Mark 2:27, Jesus interpreted what the Sabbath meant. He said, "*The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.*" The Pharisees had the purpose of the Law backwards. They loved and served the Law. What they did not realize was that the Law was meant to serve them. It was intended to protect them and guard them in life.

¹ The Mishnah was an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud.

The Law of the Sabbath was to lead them beside quiet waters and restore their souls and their bodies. It was to remind them that God was their Provider of their daily needs and of their righteousness.

To keep the Law of the Sabbath was a display of their faith and dependence in the Lord of the Sabbath because He was their provider. So, as they ceased from their works they were worshipping God by expressing their dependence on God.

On this side of the cross, we worship and trust in God by placing our faith in the One who kept the Sabbath perfectly for us. In Christ, the Law Giver came and kept the Law of the Sabbath perfectly for us in order to give us true Sabbath rest. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God. God accepts His work as our work. Jesus also died on the cross for our sin for being Sabbath Law breakers. But here is what you need to understand, Sabbath Law breaking is your and my attempts to live life apart from God. When we labor in life to provide for ourselves, our families without honoring God and seeking God we are breaking the Sabbath. Yet it is not only forgetting God but it also includes our works of righteousness. So when we try to come to God on our own terms or earn God's approval with our own little ten commandments we are breaking the Sabbath because the Sabbath means faith in Jesus alone. All who place their faith in Jesus and stop trying to work their way to God by abandoning their labors and self-righteousness enter true rest.

When Jesus says He is the Lord of the Sabbath He is saying He is the Sabbath Rest they have been looking forward to. Jesus has fulfilled the Law of the Sabbath Law and has paid our debt of sin against God for not keeping the Law of the Sabbath. When we place our faith in Jesus, Jesus is our Sabbath Rest.

Hebrews 4:8-11, *"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."*

What Sabbath rest was the writer of Hebrews talking about? He tells us in v. 14, *"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."* It means our confession of faith in Christ unites us with the One who is our Sabbath Rest. Jesus' work on the cross earned us the rest we could never earn. The rest He gives comes from our faith in Him. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath because He fulfilled the Sabbath and is our Sabbath rest.

- Application: There is a Pharisee lurking in us all and if we are not careful we will love the law of legalism instead of the Lord of the Sabbath.
 1. What do you do to try to earn God's approval instead of resting in the person and work of Jesus on your behalf? Have you created your own little personal ten commandments that you call spiritual disciplines that helps you please God and make you feel good about yourself? Do you take your little checklist to God to see if He is impressed with your efforts? Do your efforts give you rest or are you filled with anxiety that you have not done enough? *What you need to do instead of work, work, work, is by faith rest, rest, rest in Jesus' work on your behalf. When you do this you will taste the new wine and enjoy the wedding feast.*
 2. Taking it a step further, if we are not careful we will take our little set of ten commandments and judge everyone who does not measure up to our spiritual laws. We will do exactly what the Pharisees did and begin to live in by our own laws and require everyone else to do the same.

3. Transition: Beware the Pharisee that lurks in us all. We all love works-righteousness or as it is also known as self-righteousness. It makes us feel good and we think it makes us look better than everyone else. When it is full blown it will lead to my fourth point: malice or mercy.

IV. Malice or Mercy (Luke 6:6-11)

- You have got to love vv. 6-11. It begins with the phrase, *"On another Sabbath."* The Pharisees were not going to give up. Since they could not control Jesus they would have to kill Him. This passage is the introduction to their plot to kill Jesus.

Yet, Jesus knew their hearts. He knew where it was all going and even knowing this, Jesus did not back down from the Pharisees. Their misunderstanding of the Law of the Sabbath was turning into sabotage. They waited till there was another Sabbath and they wanted to trap Jesus. Many scholars believe that the man Jesus healed in this passage was planted there by the scribes and Pharisees.

- According to the Pharisees rules and traditions, healing on the Sabbath was a work. Sure, you could heal someone on the Sabbath if it was life or death but if it was not life or death then it would have to wait. The man Jesus healed was not dying and indeed Jesus could have waited but Jesus knew their thoughts. He knew they had ruined the Sabbath for people by making it a miserable day.

In v. 9, Jesus explained the point of Sabbath. It was a day for doing good, *"I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?"* It was a day for loving your neighbor not harming your neighbor by doing nothing. The Sabbath was a day for doing good but the Pharisees were good for nothing. They had a long "to-do" but showing mercy was not on the list.

So, was it lawful for Jesus to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath? The answer is yes because the Sabbath is for mercy. The Sabbath is for healing. The Sabbath is for life.

In Matthew 12:5-7 Jesus unpacked the purpose of work on the Sabbath more when He addressed the work of the priests on the Sabbath, *"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."*

- Application: Is there a Pharisee lurking in your heart?
 - The Pharisees thought holiness was building fences around the law so they would not even come close to committing sin. However, there is MORE TO godliness than staying away from certain kinds of sins. The fact is our natural tendency is to define godliness by the sins we do not do. Yet God wants and indeed calls us to be involved in the messiness of the lives of others for the sake of the gospel and the glory of God. As we get involved life is challenging and hard. We get tired and frustrated with people but God wants us to have a heart for people in need. He desires mercy from us. He desires us to love our neighbor. 1 John 3:17 teaches us that if we see a brother in need and we close our heart to him then the love of God does not abide in us. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan for that very reason. He crossed the lines of the enemy and put his money where his heart was—loving his neighbor.
 - Do you look for ways to get involved in people's problems or do you avoid them? We should look for ways to get involved in others problems instead of avoiding them. Sometimes we will look for some spiritual rule or principle to avoid people and their problems. We will avoid giving money or helping

someone out because they do not meet our standard. Relationships are messy and when we get involve in muck of people's lives we may get dirty.

So, yes, Sunday is the Lord's Day, it is a day of rest but it is also a day of worship. Sometimes on a Sunday you may need to go home and take a nap for the glory of God but sometimes you will have to put on your work clothes and help a brother or sister out.

Some Sundays you will have to fix meals for other people, welcome a stranger into your house, visit the sick, clean the house of a friend who is receiving cancer treatments, go to the nursing home, visit the bereaved, do some counseling, give a college student a ride from campus or to back to the dorms, fix a car, stay late at church talking to people or helping others or a hundred other things that will display the love and mercy of Christ.

Conclusion

I think you will come to learn what I have come to learn about Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is not inactivity but it is following Jesus and He wears us out in His service and yet it is a joy. It is rest because the *Lord of the Sabbath gives us His joy, welcomes us to His table fellowship, gives us the new wine of new life and cures the Pharisee in us all.*