

## STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

### THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

Read Luke 6:1-11

#### **Introduction**

Unless we understand the religion of the Pharisees, we'll never grasp why their teaching and Jesus' teaching were so completely opposed. Imagine two concentric circles. The inner circle represents the Mosaic Law itself as it appears in the Bible. The outer circle represents a series of rules interpreting the Law. The Pharisees felt that the Law was so holy, that they needed to place a "hedge" or "fence" around it, so that no one would inadvertently break the Law. This "hedge" was the "traditions of the elders," a body of oral law written down by the Rabbis in the second century and later to form the Talmud. The idea was, if you keep the oral law, you can't help but keep the actual Mosaic Law.

What resulted was a law-centred religion. Love for God was expressed in love for his Law. But being consumed with keeping the Law for its own sake makes one vulnerable to being centred on one's own performance, rather than on the more important principles that underlie the Law – love for one's neighbour, real justice, and mercy. Jesus accused the Pharisees of tithing even on garden herbs but neglecting the love of God (Luke 11:42).

#### **The Challenge:**

*“Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands. And some of the Pharisees said to them, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”” (Luke 6:1-2)*

In the area of Sabbath observance, the Pharisees had an especially large accumulation of rules and most of these rules focused on the Sabbath. The Pharisees and scribes began to define what was and was not work, and some of their rules were just plain silly. It is not as if Jesus disciples were doing something wrong in gleaning fields that was not theirs. There was nothing wrong with what they did. Their gleaning was not considered stealing, according to Deuteronomy 23:25.

The Pharisees must have been watching Jesus and his disciples for just such a violation of their Sabbath rules. And when they spotted the disciples eating grain in the fields, they asked: *“Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?” (6:2)*

#### **Jesus' Response**

*“But Jesus answering them said, “Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?” And He said to them, “The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”” (vv3-5)*

Jesus' answer is different than I would have expected. Jesus refers to the incident in 1 Samuel 21:1-9, where David flees for his life, when he learns that King Saul is seeking to kill him. He goes to Nob, a village in Benjamin where the tabernacle is located. The priest is surprised that he is traveling alone, and David makes up a story about the secrecy of the mission and about meeting his men later. He asks for five loaves of bread for his journey, and the priest answers that he has nothing to give him except some of the special consecrated bread (KJV "shewbread") that has just been replaced by fresh bread and had sitting for a week before the Presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. According to Leviticus 24:5-9, it is reserved for the priests who must eat it in a holy place.

Nevertheless, the priest gives David some of the consecrated bread for him and for his men. He does so because David is the King's emissary and son-in-law, and he is on a holy mission and is hungry.

What point is Jesus making by referring to this incident? Apparently, that human need should override bare legalism, for Mark adds Jesus' comment, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*" (**Mark 2:27**).

Can we explore our understanding of this verse in Mark 2:27?

The Pharisees must have been fuming. To them the opposite was true, that man must conform himself to the Law no matter what the inconvenience or need.

This is exactly what many people, steeped in tradition, simply cannot accept. They don't believe that what God really wants is mercy before sacrifice (Hosea 6:6); that love to others is more important than religious rituals (Isaiah 58:1-9); that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart; these, O God, You will not despise (Psalm 51:17).

Jesus is making the point clear: any application of the Sabbath Law which operates to the detriment of man is out of harmony with God's purpose.

### **Lord of the Sabbath:**

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. Instead, He asserts his own authority: "*The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.*" (6:5). If David could eat the consecrated bread, how much more should the antitype of David do so? Though Jesus does not clearly state the messianic implications of his self-designation Son of Man, they are implied here. Jesus declares that He is the Lord of the Sabbath and was proclaiming to the world, especially to the legalistic Pharisees, that He was greater than the Law and above the laws of the Mosaic Covenant because, as God in flesh, He is the Author of those laws.

As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus had the right, power, and authority to dispense it in any way He pleased. The Lord of the Sabbath had come, and with His death and resurrection He became the fulfilment of our "Sabbath rest." The salvation we have in Christ has made the old law of the Sabbath no longer needed or binding. When Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), Jesus was attesting to the fact that, just as the Sabbath day was originally instituted to give man rest from his labours, so did He come to provide us rest from labouring to achieve our own salvation by our works. Because of His sacrifice on the cross, we can now forever cease labouring to attain God's favour and rest in His mercy and grace.

### **Healing on the Sabbath:**

*"Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered. So, the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. But He knew their thoughts and said to the man who had the withered hand, "Arise and stand here." And he arose and stood. Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?" And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. But they were filled with rage and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."* (**vv6-11**)

Luke includes a final incident to illustrate Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees. On another Sabbath, Jesus enters a synagogue -- we're not told in which town this occurs -- and begins to teach. In that particular synagogue is a man whose right hand is withered, probably some form of muscular atrophy or paralysis.

Whether or not he was planted by the Pharisees in order to trick Jesus into breaking the Sabbath laws, we don't know, but Luke notes that:

*"So, the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. " (Luke 6:7)*

Jesus is aware of the Pharisees' motives and tells the man with the withered hand, *"Come and stand here in the middle of the room."* (TPT). The stage is set for a confrontation.

Do you back out from manifesting the gospel because of the world's opinion?

With the poor handicapped man standing before them, Jesus asks, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" (6:9). Jesus looks around at them all, waiting for an answer. Surely, their own Sabbath tradition affirmed that the Sabbath was for doing good. How could they argue at that? But by their looks, Jesus can tell that they are unhappy at His question and the sensible argument He had put forward. The Pharisees have no concern, no pity for the man standing in the synagogue. All they can think about is their precious interpretation of the Law. Mark's Gospel adds,

*"He looked around at them in anger ... deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts." (Mark 3:5)*

Jesus looks around at the Pharisees in their petty stubbornness and self-righteousness. Then he turns to the man and says, "Stretch out your hand." As the man does so, it is completely restored to normal. In my mind's eye I can see him hold his healed right hand up next to his normal left hand and break into a great smile. The people in the synagogue gasp. But the Pharisees are angry. The reaction of the religious leaders is shocking, but true. When Jesus did this miracle on the Sabbath, He met the needs of simple people and broke the petty religious traditions of the establishment.

This section concludes with the Pharisees beginning to plot how they might stop Jesus, a plot that grows until it culminates in Jesus' death.

### **Lessons for Disciples**

What will you learn from this experience and teaching of Jesus? We had Jesus, His disciples, Pharisees and Scribes, the man with the withered hand, and the people in these two Sabbaths. You, as the present-day disciple of Jesus should learn from our Master.

1. Love, Mercy, and Grace is above all form of legalism in God's kingdom
2. Desperate need made an exemption for David, and for Jesus' disciples. We relate with people based on compassion with the aim of restoration
3. Don't shy away when you have been set-up by unbelievers but boldly rely on the Holy Spirit on what to say, do, act at that moment.
4. By doing good like what Jesus did to this disabled man, you will still offend some and just as the religious leaders tried to destroy Jesus, there are those who will also try to destroy you.

