

## Lord of the Sabbath

Luke 6:1-11 on March 23, 2025

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*Please read Luke 6:1-11 before going further in this transcript.*

Back in the Old Testament book of Exodus, God's gives the Israelites, His special, chosen people, a list of commandments for how He would like them to live in a covenant relationship with Him. One of Yahweh's 10 Commandments, #4, is centered on the Sabbath. Exodus 20:8-11 says, "8 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."

Practicing a weekly Sabbath rest was a consistent demonstration of the ongoing covenant relationship between Yahweh and His special, chosen people, the Israelites.<sup>1</sup> From the time after the Exodus, right on up to the time of Christ some 1,500 years later, the Israelite people observed the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, and not doing any work. Even as God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day after working for the 6 days of creation, so also the Israelites were to follow this pattern by resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, and doing all of their work on the other 6 days of the week.<sup>2</sup> All of this resting was to be done in honor and reverence to the Lord. This was Yahweh's command. And by the time we get to the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the Jews had been worshipping God in this way for some 15 centuries! This is the historical background for Jesus' incredibly bold declaration that He is "Lord of the Sabbath."

Luke 6:1-2 begins, "1 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?"<sup>3</sup> So what exactly is unlawful here? It certainly wasn't unlawful to eat on the Sabbath, nor was it unlawful to eat a stranger's grain. You see, in Jewish culture, there was an allowance for this. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, "If you enter your neighbor's

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<sup>1</sup> See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 126 footnote on Exodus 20:10.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 5:12-15 further clarifies... "14 ...so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. 15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm...." The Israelites were commanded to include their servants in this day of rest, in remembrance of their own time of slavery in Egypt.

<sup>3</sup> The other two synoptic Gospels have parallel passages in Matthew 12:1-14 and Mark 2:23-3:6.

grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.” Now, I wouldn’t recommend this in our current day and age, here in America, but there’s a clear allowance in God’s Word for the Israelites to handpick small amounts of grain from their neighbor’s field. This means that, in Jesus’ day, they wouldn’t have accused His disciples of stealing, which would have violated the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment.

So then, what is unlawful here? Well, it’s debatable, whether there was actually anything unlawful going on here, but the Pharisees sure thought there was.<sup>4</sup> You see, today’s passage not only raises questions about what’s lawful on the Sabbath, but also about what’s been unnecessarily added to God’s law as a matter of human opinion or tradition. Technically speaking, the disciples were “harvesting,” which the Pharisees then considered working on the Sabbath. Over the previous 1,500 years of history, the Sabbath regulations had grown more and more complicated and particular. So in the view of some, the disciples behavior would have been considered a fourfold violation of the Sabbath, because they weren’t just harvesting: they were reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing the food!<sup>5 6</sup>

So, strictly speaking, there was a lot of unlawful activity involved in the disciples’ behavior. And the Pharisees were calling them out for it, and, by association, they were calling out Jesus Himself. After all, He did bear some responsibility for the conduct of His followers. (*“Jesus, You need to keep Your disciples in line here!”*) Now I’m guessing that many of us here today would agree that this feels like a pretty legalistic way of viewing the disciples’ activity. Nonetheless, I suppose one could make a case that they were technically breaking God’s injunction against working on the Sabbath.<sup>7</sup> (*By the way, to be clear, today’s text doesn’t really address our modern-day questions about if or when Christians should observe a Sabbath today. There are other texts which do address these questions, but that’s for another sermon.*<sup>8 9 10</sup>)

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<sup>4</sup> “The action seems innocent enough, but in the eyes of some, it is not appropriate for the Sabbath, as the disciples are about to discover.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 522.

<sup>5</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 523.

<sup>6</sup> For those of us who aren’t farmers, reaping is cutting the crop, threshing is separating the grain from the stalks, and winnowing is separating the grain from the chaff (the husk and other debris). *Google search*.

<sup>7</sup> See Exodus 34:21.

<sup>8</sup> I addressed the topic of rest back in 2022. See <https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/rest-renewal/>.

<sup>9</sup> Colossians 2:16-17 says, “16 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.” In Mark 2:27 Jesus says, “...The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

<sup>10</sup> In today’s passage, Jesus skillfully discerns what’s within the bounds of LAWFUL Sabbath activity, and in doing so He clearly demonstrates that He is Lord of the Sabbath, which He later openly declares in verse 5. What we’re going to see here today is that the Pharisees leaned DISPROPORTIONALLY toward

Now, for the disciples' part, they weren't trying to cause any trouble, or break God's Law, they were just hungry,<sup>11</sup> just like David and his companions who are mentioned in the very next verse... Luke 6:3-5 says, "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." Now, you have to smile at least a little, when Jesus asks the Pharisees, "Have you never read?"<sup>12</sup> I mean, of course they'd read it, but the point Jesus is making is that they'd never quite understood it, including a key ramification from it, which Jesus was now highlighting.

Verse 3 is referring to what David did back in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, during a time when he and his men were being hunted by King Saul. When we go back and read the story, we learn that David and his men were all ceremonially clean, and that the priest actually authorized them to eat the consecrated bread, even though it was only lawful for the priests to eat the bread of the presence. So even though some might more strictly determine this as unlawful, apparently both David and this priest decided that it was well within the spirit of the law, and well within the necessary means of meeting their immediate need for food.

Now this is significant, because the Jews in Jesus' day had a high view of David's authority, so it would have been difficult for them to argue against Jesus' point, without calling into question David's decision to feed his men. Jesus then uses this angle to suggest that He has authority similar to David's, and actually, even greater authority. David and Jesus were both men of authority, and both allowed their followers to eat under some arguably questionable conditions. But if David had the authority to serve the consecrated bread to his men, then certainly Jesus had the authority to permit His disciples to eat some kernels of harvested grain.<sup>13</sup> So one point that we non-Jews might tend to miss here, is that this passage highlights

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ABSOLUTE rigidity in keeping the Sabbath, while Jesus leaned APPROPRIATELY toward the spirit of the law. Jesus practices compassion and doing good on the Sabbath, over and above any stoic burden that might be placed on people to keep it rigidly. God's intended purpose for the Sabbath was indeed that it be kept holy and set apart for His glory, but also that it be a blessing of much-needed rest, not a burden. So Jesus is teaching His disciples that exercising compassion, and doing good on the Sabbath, supersedes any kind of Pharisaic rigidity of observing the law. Jesus will address this directly when we get to verse 9.

<sup>11</sup> We can only imagine the challenges there may have been for Jesus and His disciples to find food as they traveled so many miles, mostly on foot. They were burning through lots of calories, and they didn't have the luxury of modern-day convenience stores to which you and I are accustomed.

<sup>12</sup> See Matthew 12:3,5; 19:4; 21:42; 22:31.

<sup>13</sup> Grain from the field and consecrated bread are directly related, both were simple daily food, "daily bread" if you will.

Jesus' authority as equal to David's; in fact, even greater than David's.<sup>14 15</sup>  
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You see, the Pharisees believed that they were the experts on Sabbath practices, but Jesus declares that He's more than an expert, He declares that He's Lord of the Sabbath; He's on a whole other level. In verse 5, Jesus once again uses one of His favorite titles to refer to Himself: "The Son of Man." The origins of this title, go back to Daniel 7, where the "the Son of Man" "is pictured as a heavenly figure who in the end times is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power."<sup>17</sup> In other words, if the Son of Man says it's ok, then it's ok: "I'm the Son of Man, and I'm telling you that picking and eating a few kernels of grain on the Sabbath is just fine." Jesus' authority far exceeded that of the Pharisees, and of King David, and of whoever else.<sup>18</sup>

Luke then goes on to write about another related Sabbath day event, when Jesus puts His declaration of lordship into action, and thereby proves that He is indeed the Lord of the Sabbath. Luke 6:6-7 goes on, "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." So here we are on another Saturday in the Jewish calendar, and all kinds of people have gathered at the local synagogue for worship. Jesus was there teaching that day, but there was also someone else there, a man in obvious need of healing, and Jesus had been performing all kinds of miraculous healings around this time. Now not only does Jesus have a gathered congregation watching and listening to Him, but He also has... some spies!

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<sup>14</sup> "Luke added "only" to his account in order to emphasize David's violation of the commandment. This ultimately then heightens the authority of the One greater than David, i.e., the Lord of the Sabbath." Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 189.

<sup>15</sup> "It is thus the Son of Man, not the Pharisees by means of their regulations, who ruled and properly interpreted the Sabbath." Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 189.

<sup>16</sup> "Jesus has the authority to overrule human regulations concerning the Sabbath, such as those reflecting the interpretations of the Pharisees." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 1714-1715 footnote on Luke 6:5.

<sup>17</sup> See Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus refers to Himself as "the Son of Man" more often than any other title in the Gospels. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1671 footnote on Mark 8:31.

<sup>18</sup> It's interesting to note that in the Greek, the word order here begins with the word "Lord." So we could translate verse 5, "LORD of the Sabbath is the Son of Man." "A literal rendering according to word order is, 'Lord is of the Sabbath the Son of Man.'" Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, pp. 525-526.

The Pharisees had it out for Jesus! The Greek word for this phrase in verse 7, “watched him closely,” has a bit of a sinister connotation to it.<sup>19 20</sup> So they were looking for any reason they could find to pounce on Jesus. Not only was He on their radar, He was on their watchlist, and they were building a casefile against him. As Luke is writing this, it also causes you and me to keep an eye on Jesus, and to build our own casefile on Jesus, hopefully not against Him but rather about Him. Who really is this Jesus? What did He actually do while He walked on this earth?

It’s important to realize that the Pharisees weren’t there to see if Jesus *could* heal on the Sabbath, because, by now, they knew that He had the ability to heal. They were there to see if Jesus *would* heal on the Sabbath, if He would heal on a day when the Pharisees declared that He absolutely shouldn’t (with the only exception being over a matter of life and death, which this clearly was not.)<sup>21</sup> Their thinking was more in line with the indignant synagogue leader in Luke 13:14, “...There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”<sup>22</sup> Now, this is quite an interesting perspective, especially coming from men who have no known record of performing their own healings. Luke doesn’t record any accounts of someone coming to the Pharisees to be healed on ANY day of the week, whether it be on a Sabbath day or otherwise. And we certainly don’t hear the Pharisees invite this man to come and see them the next day, so that they can help him out.

Luke 6:8 goes on, “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.” Clearly Jesus wasn’t intimidated by these religious leaders. Now, He wasn’t flaunting His authority and power, but He also wasn’t hiding it, or in any way keeping it secret. Jesus wanted everyone there to see what He’s about to do, and how it would verify His claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Greek word in verse 7 here “means to spy on or watch out of the corner of one’s eye, which adds [a bit of] a sinister note.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 528.

<sup>20</sup> παρατηρέω = “watch closely, observe carefully... ① observe someone to see what the person does, watch... From the context this can take on the meaning *watch maliciously, lie in wait for.*” (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 771.)

<sup>21</sup> “Jewish tradition prescribed that aid could be given the sick on the Sabbath only when the person’s life was threatened, which obviously was not the case here.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1657 footnote on Mark 3:2.

<sup>22</sup> Consider Exodus 20:9.

<sup>23</sup> Luke records 4 other Sabbath healings: **In Luke 4:31-37**, on the Sabbath, Jesus healed a demon possessed man. **In Luke 4:38-39**, on the Sabbath, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. **In Luke 13:10-17**, on the Sabbath, Jesus heals a woman who’d been crippled for 18 years. **In Luke 14:1-6**, on the Sabbath, Jesus heals a man who suffered from abnormal swelling. (*Once again Jesus was being carefully watched, and once again Jesus asked them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” Once again, they have nothing to say.*)

So in full view of the entire gathered synagogue, He makes a not-so-subtle point in Luke 6:9-10, “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.” Verse 10 says that Jesus looked around (*insert dramatic pause*).<sup>24</sup> Would anyone dare to answer His open question?<sup>25</sup> Well, apparently not, so Jesus heals this man by saying just a few words: “Stretch out your hand.” And you’ve got to admit, there’s a touch of irony here. After all, for Jesus, this really doesn’t amount to much “work” at all; He merely says one sentence, and it’s done. Such a simple thing for Him to do, with such a profoundly helpful result to do good in this man’s life.<sup>26</sup>

**By doing this, on the Sabbath, Jesus proves at least two things:**

**1) First of all, Jesus is indeed the Lord of the Sabbath.**

The proof is in the pudding, and this particular miracle was performed right in front of their eyes, as a demonstration of this very truth.

**2) Secondly, It’s lawful to do good, and to save life, all 7 days of the week, including on the Sabbath.**

Yes, it’s true, Jesus could have waited until the next day and arranged another time to heal this man. However, that would have entirely missed the point that He was trying to make: God’s intent for the Sabbath wasn’t to restrict someone’s “ability to love people and meet their basic needs.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>28</sup> You see, Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath, not only reveals His authority and power, it also reveals His compassion.

For the Pharisees, the Sabbath had become a heavy burden that they’d laid on themselves and on everyone around them. It was a religious weight to carry, rather than the gracious and sustaining gift of rest and life that God intended it to be.<sup>29</sup> They were so caught up in their own personal piety that they’d lost any grounding in common sense, and in common human decency to simply do what’s good.<sup>30 31</sup> I appreciate how New Testament scholar Darrell Bock says it: Jesus is “operating on the principle of the law

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<sup>24</sup> A parallel passage for Luke 6:10, is found in Mark 3:5, which clarifies, “He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...”

<sup>25</sup> What we don’t hear is any reply from the Pharisees, including a reply something like this: “Oh Jesus, no, no, no. Of course! Of course it’s lawful to do good and to save life on the Sabbath.”

<sup>26</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 530.

<sup>27</sup> “...The healing could have been put off; but it was not.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 513.

<sup>28</sup> Consider Luke 13:10-17.

<sup>29</sup> “Jewish tradition had so multiplied the requirements and restrictions for keeping the Sabbath that the burden had become intolerable. ...the God-given purpose of the Sabbath [was] a day intended for the benefit of people (for spiritual, mental, and physical restoration).” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1657 footnote on Mark 2:27.

<sup>30</sup> Micah 6:8 comes to mind: “act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.”

<sup>31</sup> Navigating what’s lawful vs. what’s good. They were more concerned with the extra laws and rules that they’d come up with, than they were about the outpouring of God’s provision for those in need.

of love. In contrast stands the Pharisees' condemnatory attitude, not to mention their spying. Because of excessive concern over the Sabbath, they are not willing to let a man be freed from his condition. ... The intent of the Sabbath was to prevent people from working [seven] consecutive days without rest, to provide time for rejuvenation, and to give time to contemplate God. Certainly it was never intended to prevent one from doing good. ...in effect, Jesus says, 'Why delay a healing when good can be done now?' ...Jesus [demonstrates] God's endorsement for doing good on the Sabbath. The endorsement comes with the healing... If Jesus is right, [then] God will heal the man through him, even though it is the Sabbath... the miracle serves as an audiovisual pointing to the truth and its agent.<sup>32 33</sup>

Verse 11 concludes with their disappointing response: "But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus." But *why* were they furious; why such a strong reaction? Why not be at least a little happy for this guy? Why not rejoice at Jesus willingness and ability to do good on the Sabbath? Well, one explanation may be that they were embarrassed. Another, is that they were likely jealous. And still another, is that they simply couldn't fit Jesus into their religious box. Last week Pastor Eric preached on Jesus' parable about old and new wine. This new wine that Jesus was bringing couldn't be contained in the Pharisee's old wineskins. They were still stubbornly insisting, "The old is better."<sup>34</sup>

So what were they going to do about Jesus? Hum... what were they plotting here at the end of verse 11? Maybe to...

...Report Him to the Jewish authorities?

...Try to get Him banned from the synagogue?

...Kill Him? (That's actually what the parallel account in Mark's Gospel indicates.)<sup>35</sup>

Their intense frustration was likely fueled by their own understanding that God wouldn't grant the authority to heal, to someone who was actively sinning. They were confounded by the reality that Jesus, who was a consistent violator of the Sabbath, continued to pull off a Spirit-empowered healing and teaching ministry right before their very eyes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "...Jesus exercises power, on the Sabbath, in the synagogue." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, pp. 530-531.

<sup>33</sup> Jesus failed to get a vote of affirmation from the Pharisees, but the restoration of this man's hand revealed a clear vote of confidence from His Heavenly Father. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 533.

<sup>34</sup> "Jesus' handling of the Sabbath made him a threat to traditional Judaism as the leaders sought to preserve it." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 511.

<sup>35</sup> See Mark 3:6.

<sup>36</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 530.

Verse 11 says they were furious, “filled with fury.”<sup>37</sup> The Greek here has a nuance of mindless rage, or irrational anger.<sup>38</sup> They were losing their minds because they couldn’t stand up to Jesus’ incredible wisdom and power. Jesus was running circles around these “experts in the law.” They knew it, and so did everyone else in the synagogue that day.

But they could have chosen to humble themselves, and reacted differently. After seeing this miracle up close with their own eyes, after hearing Jesus’ teaching and explanation with their own ears, they could have responded by falling on their knees in reverent worship. They could have declared that Jesus was the rightful Lord of the Sabbath. But, sadly, they didn’t.

From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry back in Luke 4, Luke has been writing about multiple aspects of His authority and power. In today’s passage, Luke writes that Jesus has authority and power...

...to challenge the Pharisaic traditions, and their overly strict interpretations of God’s Law.

...to determine what’s ok on the Sabbath

...to heal someone, even on the Sabbath.

In his Gospel, Luke has undertaken to write up an orderly account of the many things that Jesus fulfilled among the people of His day. Leading up to today’s text, Luke wrote about Jesus’ authority and power...

...to heal *and* to forgive sins.

...to fill two fishing boats so full of fish that they nearly sank.

...to cast out demons.

...to teach with an authority and power that people had never seen before.

...to proclaim good news to the poor, and freedom for the captives.

You see, being Lord of the Sabbath, is just one more aspect of who Jesus is and what He’s capable of: ***JESUS is Lord of all things!***

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<sup>37</sup> See the ESV.

<sup>38</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 530.