

Lord of the Sabbath, Part 3

Luke 6:1-5

There in Luke Chapter 6 follow along as I read in Luke 6:1 through 11. "On a Sabbath, while he," that is Jesus, "was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?' Jesus answered them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry? He and those who were with him, 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 he also gave it to those with him.' And he said to them, 'The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was, was teaching and a man was there whose right hand was withered.

"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. But he knew their thoughts and said to the man

with a withered hand, 'Come and stand here,' and he arose and stood there, 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?' After looking around at them all, he said to him, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he did so and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."

We're going to focus though on this Sabbath offense, this unlawful act of plucking heads of grain, rubbing them between their fingers and eating on the Sabbath. Something that the Pharisees said was not lawful. In verse five, it ends that first section, saying, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." That is the key teaching of this passage. And it's going to be the subject of both the controversies that Luke describes here. His disciples were gleaning grain on the Sabbath. You might not think it was such a big deal, but it was. Jesus himself healed on the Sabbath an even bigger deal.

Right in the presence of the Pharisees and all of that together provoked the Pharisees, as it says there, "To fury." If you can believe it? It shouldn't have bothered them. Shouldn't

have bothered them at all. If they had been able to embrace Jesus' earlier message, you can look back at Luke 5:24 that he is "The Son of Man." And if they had embraced that, they would have been well prepared for this, here, an assertion of his lordship over the Sabbath day as well.

Jesus claimed to possess authority to forgive sins. On that occasion, Luke chapter 5, he demonstrated his power to heal, repeatedly. But these are the prerogatives and power of God himself, and as the Son of Man, he possessed them, very clear. So it shouldn't surprise anyone that Jesus possessed authority to exercise lordship over the Sabbath day as well. But since the religious establishment didn't accept his earlier claim that he is the Son of Man, didn't accept his claim to be authoritative. They weren't likely to accept this claim either that he's Lord of the Sabbath.

We looked at John Chapter 5. This controversy we see in Luke 6 actually started earlier in Jerusalem. Jesus in Jerusalem healed a man who'd been paralyzed for 38 years, and he commanded him, and it was, by the way, it was on the Sabbath day. He said, "Get up, take your bed and walk." Religious leaders confronted

that man for carrying what we called an unlawful burden on the Sabbath day. It was heavier than what? A dried fig, right? So it was too heavy. You can't carry that and transport it from one place to another in public. When they questioned the man a bit, they found out it was Jesus who gave that unlawful command about carrying an unlawful burden.

The ensuing confrontation between Jesus and the Jews there, it resulted not in Jesus backing down at all. He doubled down in fact on his claims of divine authority and divine prerogative. It says in John Chapter 5 verses 16 to 17, "The Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. Jesus answered them, he said, 'My father is working until now. And I am working.'" That is, the father is working even on the Sabbath, and I'm working on the Sabbath as well. He angered them even further when he said in verse 18.

Jews, it says, and Jews, "The Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was an, even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God." So they got the point. They understood the import or the impact of his words. "My father is working until

now and I am working.” He was putting himself on the same level as God the Father.

The problem with the Jewish leadership, as we said, it's not that they took the Sabbath too seriously. The problem is that they took themselves too seriously. They had no sense of humility about themselves, let alone mercy and compassion toward other people. When it came to matters of the law. They failed to see God's compassion, his mercy, all through the Old Testament Scriptures.

It says nothing about God, says everything about them, says everything about their hearts. Even though this confrontation here in Luke Chapter 6 is about Jesus' assertion of lordship over the Sabbath day. And how that offended these self-designated Lords of the Sabbath. It's not as if the Sabbath day was unimportant to God, it was.

For those of us who tend to judge the Pharisees for maybe being too concerned about treating the Sabbath day as holy. The truth is that we need to get the log out of our own evangelical

eye first, right? Because we have not been treating the Sabbath day as holy, we've not been treating Sundays as holy. If we get that log out of our eye, we can see more clearly to judge ourselves and even to judge these Pharisees.

Many of us have been raised in a church environment in which we haven't treated this principle, Sabbath worship as holy at all. The one day of rest in seven principle, that predates the law of Moses. So this is not a law thing. This is another principle of creation, just like the distinction between male and female, just like the institution of marriage itself. Many of us evangelicals, we've been profaning the Lord's day all our lives, like the rest of the culture, doing whatever we want to do on the Sabbath days, on Sundays.

These days we've been very concerned, rightly concerned to resist the culture, to protect the gender binary of male and female, to protect the sanctity of marriage, that's exactly right. Those were exactly the right stances, positions to take, but since those very truths are based upon what God did during Creation week, shouldn't we be just as concerned to insist on

everything that we see written in Creation week? Shouldn't we also practice the principle of Sabbath rest?

Shouldn't we also protect and insist upon a literal interpretation of creation that is defining a day biblically, taking the Bible's timetables, and all that it says and all that it covers, literally? Why do we pick and choose? Listen, the more faithful we are to all of God's word. Treating as holy the Scripture as a whole and all of its constituent parts, including the principle of Sabbath rest. The better we will be able to discern the heart of God on every matter to put his truth into practice in our lives.

He is holy, yes, he's merciful as well. He's compassionate, yes, also exacting in his justice. We don't want to elevate the one to the diminishment or the detriment of the other. We need to keep everything that God says about himself, about his ways, about his heart, in proper alignment biblically. Again, as I said, the problem with the Jewish leadership is not that they took the Sabbath day too seriously. They just took themselves too seriously.

We need to take note. We don't want to elevate any of our own traditions to the level of biblical authority like they did. We don't want to promote ourselves to the level of Sabbath lords over anybody's consciences. There is one who governs and commands our conscience and it's the Lord Jesus Christ. In their first encounter with the true and the only Lord of the Sabbath, which was at that feast in Jerusalem, John 5. The Jews were so blinded by their pride they were unable to see Jesus for who he really is.

God truly is his father, and therefore he's completely justified, number, one in claiming equality with God and number two, in determining, determining what is and what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day, is he not? So, these Pharisees they were fueled with self-righteous anger. The Jewish leaders pursued Jesus not just there in Jerusalem, but they followed him back to Galilee, to his ministry in Galilee. He's all the way up there in Galilee.

They followed him. He's up there ministering with his disciples, and they caught up with him, on one particular Sabbath day. As he's walking with his disciples through the grain fields of Israel. Look again at verses 1-3. This is the first point that we covered, called an unjustified accusation, an unjustified accusation. It says, "On a Sabbath while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?' And Jesus answered them, 'Have you not read?'" Stop there.

This is a confrontation about authority; about authority, not about what is or is not okay to do on the Sabbath. Jesus' reply goes deeper than arguing about lawful gleaning. He goes directly to the word. He goes directly to the foundational issue of authority and he appeals to the only right standard of judgment, which is God's revealed word, the Scripture. As we noted, the Jewish leaders had raised the authority of their oral traditions up to the level of sacred Scripture.

We talked about that last time, about how the Jewish Talmud, it's like a commentary on the Mishna, which is a collection of Jewish oral tradition. Alfred Edersheim says that the "Talmud contains not less than 24 chapters." In which, he says quote, "Matters are seriously discussed as a vital religious importance, which one would scarcely imagine a sane intellect would seriously entertain." End quote. He's right, but entertain they did.

They studied these things assiduously, diligently, tirelessly, rabbis would lecture their students and disciples on the various prohibitions and traditions, train them to be experts in minutiae. I don't mean this to be derogatory at all, but just by way of illustration, you can think of them like tax attorneys today.

Experts in IRS tax code, which is constantly being added to and changed so it can be adaptable to a changing world, changing technology, changing business parameters and all of that. Then, that's why people hire. That's why they need tax attorneys

today. Why they pay their exorbitantly high fees, because the minutiae is so perplexing to all of us. And studying it and keeping up with it, is so exhausting.

Edersheim draws attention to an anecdote written in the Talmud, commending a certain rabbi who spent no less than two and a half years in the study of only one of those 24 chapters. Can you imagine that? It's like studying the IRS tax code, one item in the tax code for 2 1/2 years. You might be tempted to even commend the diligence of these rabbis and scribes and Pharisees, if, if that system had not become such a powerful tool to enslave the masses, to assert human lordship over God's Sabbath, to take a day of rest and manipulate it into a day of slavery.

Listen, when all the religious authorities of Judaism were elevating expertise in the opinions of rabbinical scholars, what do you think the students, the disciples are going to be inclined to pursue? If that's the standard, if that's what everybody around you is saying is important as a young student, as a young disciple, that's what you're going to follow. It's a self-reinforcing, self-perpetuating system that's elevating

human authority, putting it on par with biblical authority.
We've seen that before, right?

That is the fundamental error of fallen humanity and all false religion, to take the opinions of men and elevate them to the level of God's Word, giving equal weight, often even greater weight to the changing opinions of men as fallible creatures and making it more important than the infallible, immutable creator God. That is the key error, and that's what Jesus drew them too. That's what he wanted to call their attention to. He asked them a question that bypassed the controversy about tradition. Dealt instead with what the Bible actually had to teach about lawful and unlawful Sabbath day behavior.

It doesn't grant the Pharisees their starting assumption, that the oral tradition carries the same weight of biblical authority. Instead, he challenged that assumption straight off, directing the conversation back to the Scripture. "Have you not read?" They had read, they just hadn't observed carefully, and that's what we're going to try to do as we get into our second point and see how Jesus answered their challenge from Scripture using an unparalleled illustration.

An unparalleled illustration: Look at verses 3 and 4.

"Jesus answered them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 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?'" To get a better view of that story, as I said, the Pharisees, the scribes, they had all read this story. They were very familiar with it.

I would want to wager that you're probably not as familiar with that story as they were, but we do have a written word, so let's go back to 1 Samuel, Chapter 21, 1 Samuel 21. I'm assuming you're not as fresh on that illustration as they were. But we can look back at the story for ourselves in 1 Samuel 21. Jesus defended his disciple's actions on the Sabbath. And he used an illustration from early on in David's career at this point in David's life, he had been anointed by the prophet Samuel. King Saul is still on the throne. And if you've read 1 Samuel lately, you know that David's good character in 1 Samuel, it painted a vivid contrast with Saul's bad character.

Saul became more jealous. The kingdom became more dangerous for David. That's where we enter the story with David on the run. Saul wants David dead. It had been confirmed by Saul's son Jonathan, and so David left that area right away. He traveled north to Nob, no time to gather provisions for himself and for his men. Time is of the essence, and David is fleeing for his life.

Let's start reading there in 1 Samuel 21:1, "Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David, trembling, and said to him, 'Why are you alone, and no one with you?' David said to Ahimelech the priest, 'The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.'" Is that true? Did Saul send David? No, that was a lie. David told a lie and we need to acknowledge that right here in Scripture. David told a lie. We understand why David was wanting here to protect Ahimelech by keeping him in the dark. He figured that if Ahimelech was to be questioned by Saul's men, which was going to be very likely, then he'd be safe. He could, he could plead ignorance. Ahimelech could tell Saul in good conscience, he was simply exercising loyalty to the

Crown, supporting Saul's interests after all. And you may know that that didn't work.

David's lie, which was meant to protect Ahimelech ended up making him vulnerable. Giving him no warning whatsoever about the murderous Saul who came to interrogate him. Just a little bit later, Saul committed the infamous crime as you may know, in the next chapter of slaughtering the priests at Nob. Little truth from David would have been helpful. Rather than trying to manipulate the situation with a lie, but it happened.

Let's keep reading, end of verse 2, David said to Ahimelech. "I've made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place." He's talking about his men that he has waiting for him. "Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever's here. The priest answered David, 'I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread. If the young men have kept themselves from women.'" Stop there for a moment.

It's interesting at this point that Ahimelech offers David the holy bread. But only if, only if the young men are ceremonially pure. So what is this holy bread? He's talking about the bread that Jesus mentioned, he called it the bread of the presence. It was the bread that was laid out before the Lord every single week inside the holy place of the Tabernacle, was also called the show bread, or the bread of the presence, because it was laid out in the presence of God.

In Exodus 25:30, God said, "You shall set the bread of the presence on the table before me regularly." And, in fact weekly. Every Sabbath, the priest would replace those old loaves. Get rid of them, with a new set of 12 freshly baked loaves. Now, don't imagine the kind of loaves that you buy from the grocery store from King Supers or Safeway or Trader Joe's. Wherever you go, these loaves were big, they were huge. According to Leviticus 24:5, the priests were to prepare these loaves using, as it says there, "Fine flour and bake 12 loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf."

You know how much that is? When's the last time you checked your tables of weights and measures that are in the back of your

Bible? Never, I didn't think so. Same, same with me, I had to look it up. One ephah is 20.8 quarts. Now that's a lot okay, which means 2/10 of an ephah is just over 4 quarts, that is, 4 quarts of fine flour in every single loaf of bread. I heard some gasps from some ladies in the, in the congregation that, that's a pretty big loaf, isn't it? Pretty hefty loaf of bread, about 5 pounds each. Five pounds, they're to make twelve of these 5 pounds loaves, which is, 12X5 anyone? 60 pounds of bread. So when they put it on a table, it's a pretty sturdy table.

I looked at one loaf of Trader Joe's wheat bread we have at home. One serving is 34 grams and they're about 20 servings per loaf, which makes each loaf of Trader Joe's wheat bread about 1.5 pounds each, okay? I didn't even think it was much that much. It's really light stuff. It would take 40 loaves of Trader Joe's wheat bread to equal the amount that was baked and presented to the Lord each and every week. Just to give you an idea of the amount of bread here. You'd be filling your trunk every single week with that bread, and then you'd be putting that before the Lord.

Leviticus 24:6 instructed the priest to take those 12 loaves "and to set them in two piles, so six in a pile on the table of pure gold before the Lord. You shall put frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the Lord. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the Lord regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever."

Obviously, the bread is not put there to feed Israel's God. The pagans feed their gods, not Israel. This is to be as it says there, a memorial portion. It causes them to remember something. Alright, so one loaf for each tribe. Every single week of the year to remind Israel that it is God who provides Israel with bread. It wasn't just a symbolic reminder either. It was also a source of practical provision for the priesthood. As Leviticus 24:9 says God cared for Israel's priests this way, "It shall be for Aaron and his sons, they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for them a most holy portion out of the Lord's food offerings, a perpetual due."

So this is the way God prepared for and cared for his priests. Plenty of bread to sustain the priests, 12 loaves every week. The Lord provided the flour by causing the fields of Israel to be fruitful and abundant. And then he moved upon the hearts of Israel's farmers to bring grain offerings to the Tabernacle. It's a wonderful reminder of God's provision, his practical sustenance of the priests, who served before the Lord all for the sake of Israel.

Only the priests were allowed to eat the bread, nobody else. Jesus even acknowledged that in Luke 6:4 that only the priests are authorized to consume holy bread. It's an indisputable fact. But notice, look again what Ahimelech said, 1 Samuel 21:4, "I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread, if the young men have kept themselves from women." Now Ahimelech is obviously making an exception there, isn't he? Was he authorized to do that? It clearly, it said in Leviticus 24, only he and the other priests are to eat of this bread. But he's making an exception.

How is he justified in allowing David and his men to partake of the priestly bread? This holy bread, if they've met this condition of keeping themselves from women? Nothing in the law of Moses would allow Ahimelech to make this exception, but we do discover an important clue right here in this account. Look ahead at verse 7 and notice that by God's design, it says there, "A certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, he, detained before the Lord, his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsman."

"Detained before the Lord." It's not that he was in handcuffs and in the jail, in the Tabernacle. It's likely a reference to the fact that he was held up. He was there on the Sabbath day, and so as a convert to Israel's religion in the employment of Saul, he was not allowed to travel on the Sabbath. So there he is, detained before the Lord. Now turn the page to chapter 22 verses 9 and 10.

God had arranged for Doeg the Edomite to witness this encounter between Ahimelech and David at the temple that day. When Saul arrived, Doeg told Saul what he saw. He saw it, at a bit of a distance. He didn't hear the whole conversation, but he

informed Saul playing the role of an informant here, Doeg told Saul, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob to Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub, and he acquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

Stop there, this, it's a vital piece of information, isn't it? That before giving David provisions, before putting the sword of Goliath in his hand, Doeg told Saul that Ahimelech first, "Inquired of the Lord for him." What does that mean? It means he prayed. It means the Ahimelech sought the Lord about this matter. He asked God what to do. It wasn't Ahimelech who thought up this proviso, not on his own anyway, it was the Lord, who revealed to Ahimelech they can have the holy bread. If the young men have kept themselves from women.

Might seem like a strange condition placed upon their ability to partake of the bread, but it's actually very consistent with the law about partaking of holy things. The law about holy things, to abstain from marital relations was a mark of ceremonial purity and preparation to partake in holy things. They separated from normal activities in preparation for communing with the holy.

Goes back to Exodus 19:15, when God told Moses to prepare Israel to receive the law, the Ten Commandments, "He said to the people, 'Be ready for the third day.'" Don't go near a woman, that is don't have normal marital relations. So he revealed it, in Leviticus 15 he said there is an uncleanness that comes about in marital relations, ceremonially so. So it's vital before drawing near to the holy, that men abstain from that.

So continuing back in 1 Samuel 21:5 go back to there. "David answered the priests," tr, er, answer the priests, "Truly, women have been kept from us as always, when I go out on expedition. The vessels," that is the bodies, "of the young men are holy when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" David's referring to the fact as he told Ahimelech that he was on an urgent mission at the King's command.

David is reference to today, it indicates it's a Sabbath day. It's a day of ceremonial purity anyway. So his men are certainly gonna be pure for the Sabbath day, but they're also

going to be pure because they're on an expedition with him. Next verse says, 1 Samuel 21:6. "So the priest gave him the holy bread. For there was no bread there, but the bread of the presence which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away."

Text draws attention to replacing last week's bread with hot, fresh loaves in accord with Leviticus 24:8. That happened on the Sabbath. That's in accord with rabbinic tradition as well. David's arrival was on the Sabbath. That means he's traveling on the Sabbath. That means he's doing Saul's business on the Sabbath. And he's then provisioned with the holy bread on the Sabbath.