

The Lord of the Sabbath, Part 1

Luke 6:1-5

As we have been moving through Jesus' Galilean ministry, if you remember, Jesus' Galilean ministry started in chapter 4, verse 14, and goes all the way through chapter 9, verse 50. But even in these early chapters, we have been seeing an increase of opposition from the Jewish leadership. As Jesus exercises his Messianic prerogatives, as he executes his Father's perfect will, he's being led along all the while by the Holy Spirit. And Jesus' ministry, let's just say, it's making waves. It's like a bomb going off in some places with ripple effect. The concussion is spreading throughout the whole land.

And his actions, particularly on the Sabbath, his actions are making religious people uncomfortable. He operates without any real sense of concern for honoring traditions and customs of religion, and that's been causing some level of disruption to the power structures of the Jewish establishment. He didn't come in, intentioning to offend people, but nonetheless he was making

them nervous. He was making them uncomfortable, and they are beginning to look for a way to remove the irritant, Jesus.

Consider the fact that Jesus started his ministry in Galilee rather than in Judea, rather than in the capital city of Jerusalem. That alone, that fact alone, was enough to rankle the sense of Jewish nationalistic pride because instead of seeking the blessing of the intellectual and cultural elites in Jerusalem, Jesus instead went to the country hillbillies of Galilee. He went to Galilee of, let's face it, it was Galilee of the Gentiles. It wasn't exactly known for its godliness. When he first chose his disciples, his early disciples, he didn't pander to the rabbis. He didn't go seek their opinion. He didn't kowtow to the Pharisees and the scribes. He didn't even go after recruiting some of their best students, which would have been a tip of the hat to the value of their education and their influence. Jesus bypassed all of them altogether.

Instead, he chose these despised Galileans, unlearned men, untrained fishermen, and the like. Even worse, he chose a tax collector for discipleship, as we read: Levi, a despised little Mocks. And he's about to add a political zealot to the group,

along with a bunch of other social nobodies. And not only that, but he's about to name these men, twelve of them, as Apostles. That's part of what Luke wants us to see here in these opening chapters. He wants us to see in this subsection of the Galilean ministry that runs from 5:1-6:16 that this has to do with Jesus' prerogative to choose. It's Jesus' right to elect, to select, whoever he wants to.

He conducted himself and his ministry entirely according to the will of God. But as he did that, what he did, how he acted, what he said, all of that started to defy Jewish and human expectation. They expected him to be one way; he acted, and it was completely different than their expectations. The Jewish leaders, all the people who followed them, they believed they had a pretty good idea of what God was like. They put him into a pretty good box. They knew what it took to please God, thank you very much.

Jesus came, when he acted, when he spoke, he completely baffled them. He exposed their, really, their ignorance. He exposed their pride. He exposed their selfish ambition, their willingness to use religion like a stick to beat people with,

like chains to confine people with, like a way to control people. In all of his teaching, in all of his actions, he was making them actually angry.

That's why we have seen growing animosity, here. Started in the calling of Simon Peter, the calling of Matthew, and then it's culminating in the calling and commissioning of the Twelve to apostleship. This narrative is interspersed all along with this sense of conflict from the religious leaders of Israel. Notice after the first calling, if you just scan your eyes over your Bibles, the calling of the first disciples in Luke 5:1-11, there are two controversies that follow that about Jesus' healing. The first had to do with him touching a leper, in verses 12-16. And then, healing a paralytic in verses 17-26. Controversy followed those and the calling of Levi, 5:27-28. After calling him, there are two more controversies: one about eating and drinking with sinners, and another about the lack of fasting, austerity among the disciples.

Clearly, as we read over this and as we study it, we see that Jesus is innocent of all charges. What may have seemed at first glance by appear, all appearances, what may have seemed

controversial, especially in a first-century context; what was made out by his enemies and his opponents to be an offensive aspect of his ministry; well, upon closer inspection, all their accusations have actually disintegrated, haven't they? There's nothing to them. There's no substance whatsoever. Jesus' detractors are exposed, here, as small-minded slanderers. They're driven by jealousy and pride and selfish ambition. They are slandering a perfectly-legitimate ministry, in fact, the only perfectly-legitimate ministry that there ever was, a ministry full of grace and truth.

The ministry that I came from in California, it was by no means perfect. No one would ever say that. But it was a ministry that was full of humble and godly people; very, very gracious and generous men and women who were diligent in study and in practice, loved the Lord, devoted to his truth. Nonetheless, our ministry was routinely attacked and slandered. Our senior pastor, John MacArthur, took the brunt of all, a lot of that attack.

The attacks were generally based on ignorant speculations from very critical-spirited religious people. It wasn't really

the worldly people that cared. It was the religious people that wanted to put the crosshairs on our church and our pastor. Usually, time would tell how often those accusations had very little to do with truth, a lot to do with spiritual pride, a lot to do with fanciful speculations, even sounding much like conspiracy theories. And when you find at the heart of it, a lot of times there's a salacious sinfulness in the private life of many accusers. I could name case after case where that was so.

The Spirit expressly says, 1 Timothy 4:2, that things like this are going to happen against the truth in these last days. "People will speak lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared as with a hot iron." And that's going to happen with this ministry as well, folks. This church already has. I know some of you have had to deal with that kind of opposition. You need to know that it will continue, the more so as we remain faithful to truth, as we remain clear and pursue clarity about the truth in our proclamation, in our practice. The more effective we are in proclaiming Jesus Christ, well, the clearer we are about who he is, and what he wants, and how he wants us to act, and how he wants us to conduct church life, the more we're going to be persecuted for that clarity.

How do we know that? Because that is what happened with Jesus. And if it happened with him, it's going to happen with everybody who tries to most closely approximate him and his ministry. As it has happened with him, it'll happen with us as well. The more clearly we see in Scripture that the religious leaders saw Jesus, you know what? The more they hated him. Isn't that sad? They were so committed to their pride that they cut themselves off from the only source of truth, the only way of salvation.

Take a look at the text, starting in, reading in verse 1 of chapter 6. "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 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?' And he said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'

“On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so they might find a reason to accuse him. But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with a withered hand, ‘Come, stand here.’ And he arose and stood there. And Jesus said to him, ‘I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm; to save life, or to destroy it?’ And 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.”

Isn't that interesting? Jesus is the most amazing person they have ever encountered, bar none. They have come nearer than most people have ever come in all of human history to see him in action, to watch him up close, to hear his teaching. And the more they get to know him, the less they like him.



Religious leaders were drawn, Luke 5:17 tells us, they were drawn from every village of Galilee and Judea, and from even Jerusalem. They'd heard about Jesus casting out a demon on the Sabbath. Perhaps heard of him healing Peter's mother-in-law, also on the Sabbath. They heard about his cleansing of the leper, touching the leper with his own hand. So they traveled to Capernaum to check up on Jesus, to evaluate his ministry, and they found themselves increasingly offended by him, irritated, critical.

We don't read in any of these accounts any, any sense of affirmation or appreciation for him, just a chorus of critical comments and accusing questions like, like these, Luke 5:21, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies?" Luke 5:30, they're grumbling at him, muttering, "'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'" Luke 5:33, "'The disciples of John fast. So do the disciples of the Pharisees. But yours eat and drink.'" And as we get to Luke 6:11, they cannot contain their contempt for Jesus any longer. They are filled with, unbelievably, fury. The guy's just been healed, and they're filled with fury, and they discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Is, this is a deadly, murderous contempt for

Christ among the most respected religious leaders in their culture. How can that be?

In the parallel account, Matthew 9:14, it says that "the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him." Mark tells us that their hatred drove them to conspire with some rather unlikely and unsavory characters. Mark 3:6 says, "The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." The Pharisees, the Herodians, bitter rivals, political enemies, but here they joined forces. It's almost like imagining the Democrats and the Republicans getting together, hand in hand, singing Kumbaya and Let's go kill Jesus. That's what's going on. They become co-belligerents in the common cause of murdering the Messiah. It's remarkable.

What's even more interesting, notice how God has used this opposition to teach us. Notice what comes from this opposition, as it raises some things that we would never know without it. God is bringing these very intelligent men, yet, yet hardhearted religious leaders, he's bringing them to Jesus. And as they butt up against the Son of Man, as they criticize him, as they oppose

him, you know what? His true glory is being revealed. We have the privilege of seeing the manifold glory of the person and work of Jesus Christ. With every accusation, Jesus gives an apt answer.

And you know what? We learn. What we learn from this current controversy, Luke 6:1-11, it's revealed there in verse 5: "Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" That is the heart of this section of Scripture. That is a profound, an important statement of truth in this controversy over the Sabbath, that's what drew out and highlighted for us the nature of Jesus Christ as Lord of the Sabbath, being the Son of Man. And this put the spotlight right on that.

Ironically, the Pharisees have always considered themselves to be the protectors of the Sabbath. Insisting on proper Sabbath day observance, in effect they have made themselves lords of the Sabbath. And now that they're face to face with the true Lord of the Sabbath, their pretension is about to be exposed completely. They are frauds. They are false lords.

So with that as a bit of background, set in the context around this section, let's work our way just a little bit into this text. to see what was it that pushed these religious hypocrites over the edge. Point number one, an unjustified accusation. An unjustified accusation. Look again at verses 1 and 2. "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?'"

We don't know how much time has passed between the banquet at Matthew's house, which was in the previous chapter, and, and then this account here. Could have been weeks, but more likely it was months that have gone by. When we compare the Gospels, we discover that between Luke 5:39 and Luke 6:1, Jesus and his disciples have actually been to Jerusalem and back. In fact, take a look at John chapter 5, John chapter 5, because that whole chapter actually happened between Luke 5:39 and Luke 6:1, and that chapter provides some very important context for the scene that is unfolding before us in Luke 6.

John 5 begins by, by telling us about another paralyzed man that Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Look at 5:1, chapter 5 verse 1 of, of John, and follow along as I read. "After this, there was a feast of the Jews." After what? Well, after everything that we've read from Luke, actually. After all of that, "there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades, and in these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed.

"One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years, and when Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be healed?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I'm going, another steps down before me.'" It's referring to a belief that the pool had healing properties, and an angel came and visited there, and would heal someone who got to the pool first. So "Jesus said to him," verse 8, "'Get up, take up your bed and walk.' And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked." Now, note this: "That day was the Sabbath."

There you have the problem. Same issue that comes up again later in Luke 6, right? Controversy over the Sabbath started in Jerusalem, in the very heart of Jewish religion, and then it followed Jesus back to Galilee.

But there's more to see here. This conflict about the Sabbath was associated with an even deeper theological controversy. Let's continue reading there. "That day was the Sabbath. And so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.' But he answered them, 'The man who healed me, that man said to me, "Take up your bed and walk.'" They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Take up your bed and walk?"'" "Not, Who is the man who healed you? That's amazing! No. Let's find out who this violator is and go after him.

"And the man who'd been healed," verse 13, "did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen

to you.’ And the man went away, and he told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. This is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.”

Stop there for a second. The Pharisees, the Jewish leaders, had all kinds of rules about how much a person could carry on the Sabbath: how far, from what place to what place, if it was a public to a private place, or private to a public, or private-private, public-public; all these, these, uh, rules of transit and weight.

Alfred Edersheim, a Jewish convert to Christianity, he ministered in the Free Church of Scotland in the second half of the 19th century, and his life was really spent studying his own Messiah. Remarkable man. And in his magnum opus, which is called *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, big thick volume, you would love to get this and have this in your library at home: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim. He devoted a whole appendix to the Jews and their Sabbath traditions, restrictions, prohibitions.

The oral tradition about the Law of Moses is something that's called the Mishnah, and the commentary that's written about this oral tradition called the Mishnah, is called the Talmud. There's actually a Babylonian Talmud which was written in Persia. And then there's the Jerusalem Talmud, which was written, not in Jerusalem, but in Tiberius, on the Sea of Galilee. So both were written in the second century, right after this time period. All of that oral tradition, all that commentary, it was based on what's happening right now in the days of Jesus.

And Edersheim did us the great favor of studying all of that. And he helps Christians see why these Jewish leaders appear to be nitpicking Jesus and his disciples here, as well as this poor former paralytic for carrying his bed on the Sabbath. He's been healed, but now he happens to run into some very watchful Jewish leaders. He's carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath, and he is simply obeying the one who healed him, the one who clearly has power. And if he has power, he has authority. And if he tells you, pick up your bed and walk away, you're going to do it. But he inadvertently found himself in



violation of oral tradition, the Mishnah, which actually in that day, culturally, carried the weight of Mosaic law.

Here's some of the details. Since the man was in a public place and he was bearing a burden, his bedroll, he was not allowed to lift and/or carry anything heavier than the weight of a dried fig. Yeah, you heard that right. A dr, not a fig, but a dried fig, one that has the, the moisture out of it, so it's even lighter.

Okay, so if you're not allowed to carry anything on the Sabbath heavier than a dried fig, well, it's going to discourage you from carrying your, your wares, your produce from your field to the market to buy and sell it on the Sabbath, right? Can't make too much money on anything that weighs less than a dried fig. So keep it under the weight of a dried fig; you're going to stay well within the bounds. That's what they figure. Carrying a bed? Oh, definitely heavier than a dried fig. Doesn't matter that he wasn't about to sell it, doesn't matter that it wasn't, it was his own bed. Definitely heavier than a dried fig, outside

the bounds, outside the regulations. "Yeah, I know you've been healed from your 38-year paralysis, but put that burden down, now!"

There are other regulations as well. May sound pretty strange to our ears. There were prohibitions about weaving two kinds of threads. And separating two kinds of threads. They're also prob, not on the Sabbath, you don't do that. Making a knot or untying a knot. Sewing two kinds of stitches or tearing in order to sew two kinds of stitches. You know, you couldn't do any tailoring. You couldn't do any, textile production. You couldn't buy and sell clothing, nothing. All of that is out of bounds. I love this one: Edersheim said, quote, "A radish may be dipped into salt, but not left in it too long, since this would be to make pickle, and pickling vegetables is work." Not on the Sabbath. Okay? Dip, get a little salt just for your own palate, but don't you dare pickle anything.

One of my favorites has to do with a chicken laying an egg on the Sabbath. Yep, a chicken on the Sabbath, laying an egg; and whether or not that egg may be eaten, not just on the Sabbath, but ever. Answer? Has to do with one's intent for the

chicken. Okay, here's how Edersheim describes this very important rule. He says, "On the Sabbath, only such things were to be touched or eaten, as had been expressly prepared on a weekday with a view to the Sabbath."

So if it's prepared on the Sabbath, it's forbidden. If it's prepared on a weekday for the Sabbath, thumbs up, okay! So if a hen had laid on the Sabbath, that egg was forbidden because, evidently, it could not have been destined on a weekday for eating, since it was not yet laid and did not yet exist. While, if the hen had been kept not for laying, but for fattening (that is, to have some chicken dinner), the egg might be eaten as forming a part of the hen that had fallen off.

Okay, that's the rule. So a hen intended for laying eggs, you can't eat her Sabbath egg. But a hen intended for cooking and eating, her Sabbath egg is good to go, because that's just a part of her that's happened to have fallen off on the Sabbath. Pick it up, go ahead, cook it, eat it, Sabbath or whenever.

Okay, just a few examples there just enough to show you this whole thing had gotten slightly out of hand, okay? Rather than being the rest that God had intended, rather than being a rest for the people of God, the Sabbath had become quite the burden.

Look at John 5:15 again. "The man went away, told the Jews it was Jesus who'd healed him. And this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'" Verse 18, "This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Did they misunderstand Jesus? No, they did not. And rather than pulling back from the controversy, Jesus actually leaned into it, here. He even seems to stoke it a bit by giving them a more provocative explanation. Hey, you're offended by my work of healing being performed on the Sabbath? Well, get this: I'm just following the lead of my Father, who's always at work. He works, so I work. You offended now?