

Lord of the Sabbath

Luke Series #16

Luke 6:1-11

David Sunday

April 14, 2013

Let's continue in praise to God as we read His holy Word from the Gospel of Luke 6:1-11.

¹ On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. ² But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" ³ And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ 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?" ⁵ And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." ⁶ On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ And 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. ⁸ But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there. ⁹ 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?" ¹⁰ And after looking around at them all he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored. ¹¹ But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

This is God's Word.

Lord, we ask that You would give us humble, tender, responsive hearts to You and Your Word. We see from this passage that we can even stand in the presence of the living Christ, see His wonderful deeds and totally miss the point if our hearts are cold and hardened. God, give us new, clean, listening hearts that are ready to obey. Lord, we pray most of all that You would delight our hearts with the good news that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath so we might come to His table and feed and rest in Him alone. We ask this in His name. Amen.

Who Does Jesus Think He is?

Have you ever asked that question? Have you ever thought about Who Jesus is from His own perspective? This is what Luke wants us to consider. It is also what the Pharisees were thinking about as they encountered Jesus.

In my studies this week, I read about a group of business men who traveled from England to Ireland to watch a rugby match. When the plane landed, they found there was no one in the customs booth to process their passports. So two or three of the men went into the official booth, put on the caps they found there and inspected the passports of all the people who were disembarking from the plane. They had no authority to do that, but everything went just fine (from N.T. Wright, Luke for Everyone). Imagine if those customs officials had come back from their break to discover these men usurping their authority. They would have said, “Just who do you think you are? You shouldn’t be in this booth!”

That’s what the Pharisees were thinking about Jesus. “We (the Pharisees) are the ones to interpret God’s Law and set the boundaries. Now You—Jesus—come and disrupt everything and do things in a way we don’t think they should be done.” The Pharisees were especially infuriated with the way Jesus handled God’s Law in regard to the Sabbath. The Sabbath was very important as an identity marker for God’s people. When Jesus came, the Pharisees did not see Him handling the Sabbath the way they thought it should be handled.

So they were asking, “Who do You think You are, Jesus?” Jesus tells them in verse five, “I’m the Son of Man, the One Whom Daniel prophesied of in Daniel 7:14 Who has the authority to be King forever and ever. I am the Lord of the Sabbath.” That really made the Pharisees mad because they understood that the Sabbath was “*The Sabbath to the Lord your God*” (Exodus 20:10). It belonged to God. Now Jesus is saying, “The Sabbath exists to serve Me and point to Me. I made it up and have authority over it.” In doing so, Jesus is claiming to be equal with God. That was infuriating to the Pharisees.

But it can be liberating to us if we receive and believe Jesus as He reveals Himself in this passage. As I was thinking about this teaching—the Lord of the Sabbath—at first I thought, “I wonder if that’s really going to relate to us in the 21st century. This could seem esoteric, like a first-century issue or merely an interesting Bible lesson. But will we really see that this relates to us?” The more I studied this passage, the more excited I became as I saw what good news it contains for us today. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath and that is wonderful news for us.

What is the Sabbath all about? It is about rest. When Jesus says, “I am the Lord of the Sabbath” think of Him saying, “I am the Lord of rest.” One of the people who helped me understand life applications in this text is Tim Keller. He preached a wonderful sermon called “Work and Rest” which has been a help to me and its influence is in my sermon today. Tim said, “If you want rest, you have to go to Him [Jesus]. If you think you have gone to Him [Jesus], but you don’t have any rest, you still don’t know what you have [in Him]. You still haven’t taken hold of what you have.” If you want rest, you have to go to Jesus. If you’ve gone to Jesus and your heart is still restless, then you don’t realize what you have in Christ.

One of the differences between mere religiosity and a true relationship with Jesus is that Jesus comes to bring you rest in a world disrupted and filled with turmoil due to sin. He brings rest from the incessant need to prove yourself, from your guilty conscience, from your own self-reproach. He provides rest in the security of God's favor. I want us to enjoy that rest—to enter into it and experience what it means to know Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath. We're going to look at this from the perspective of Biblical theology from Genesis to this point in the Gospel of Luke and beyond. We're going to ask three questions:

1. When was the Sabbath originated?
2. Why was the Sabbath legislated?
3. How is the Sabbath appropriated?

When Was the Sabbath Originated?

To answer that question, we have to go all the way back to Genesis. In Genesis we read these words of the creation story:

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, [set it apart] because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation (Genesis 1:31-2:3).

So God rested at the end of His work of creation. We need to understand when God rested it was not because He was tired or worn out. He never sleeps nor slumbers (Psalm 121:4). Isaiah says, "*He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength*" (Isaiah 40:29). So when it says God 'rested' it has to mean something other than that He was tired. It means He was satisfied. He looked at His work—it was finished and very good—and He was satisfied in the work He had done. He said, "Now My work of creation is complete and I can dwell in the midst of My people. This world can be My dwelling place and My people can dwell with Me." God rested in satisfaction over His labors.

Then He created us. We were created to find our rest and satisfaction in Him alone. That's built into the fabric of our creation—what it means to be made in the image of God. Everyone created in this image needs one day in seven to rest. Now we don't all take that day of rest but we need it. It's not merely stopping our labors. It goes deeper than that. To rest in 'Sabbath rest' is to express our trust in God and dependence on Him to renew our strength. It is the freedom to not be defined by what you do but by Whose you are—to Whom you belong.

Every time you need to sleep at night it is a reminder that you are not God. You depend on Him to renew your strength. Every time you take a break from the weekly routine of your labors, it is meant to

remind you that you are a created being who is being taken care of by your Creator. You were made to dwell in His presence and rely on His provision, to trust and enjoy His goodness. What you do is not what defines you; rather it is who you are. You belong to Him.

This whole Sabbath idea is rooted in creation but ruined by the Fall. After man sinned in Genesis chapter three, the ground was cursed. Work and labor became full of futility and hardship. We see that in our modern day. We live in a culture where there is a great amount of job insecurity. If you want to hold onto your position, you might have to work harder and harder because there are always people in line to take your job. When there is a great disparity of income, the people at the top might make tons of money but have to work like crazy to keep it. The people at the bottom don't make much but might have to work multiple jobs in order to provide for themselves. Futility and hardship dominate our system. Plus now we have the wonderful blessing of technology which causes our work to seep into every area of our lives. We are people who struggle to find Sabbath rest.

Underneath it all, we don't just have a hard time resting from our labors. Many people find they cannot really rest even when they have the opportunity. We go on vacation and are not rested when we come back because we can't turn off something that is going on in our minds. In his sermon, Keller called it "the eternal murmur of self-reproach." It's that nagging voice within us telling us it's never enough. It's the drive that says we have to prove something about ourselves. Even if we succeed today, we have to wake up tomorrow and do it again. We look to our work and labor to find meaning to prove that we're important, successful and that we matter. But even if everyone around us is satisfied, we can't let up because of what we think will happen if we drop the ball. We feel the need to justify our own existence. That is the eternal murmur of self-reproach which makes work so wearisome.

Augustine was so right when he said, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You." Only in God can we find rest from this eternal murmur of self-reproach. Jesus says, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I'm the God Who created the Sabbath and has authority over it. In Me, you can find deep and satisfying rest." Jesus has the ability to quiet that inner, restless murmur of self-reproach. He is the First-born of the new creation where there is no turmoil, restlessness or reproach. But while this fallen world waited for the coming Messiah, God called a people to Himself—Israel—and that brings us to the second movement of our message.

Why Was The Sabbath Legislated?

It originated in creation, is built into the fabric of our humanity and is part of expressing our trust and dependence on our Creator. Why then was it legislated? Because of the Fall. God chose to redeem sinners for Himself—to redeem a people for Himself—who would reflect His blessing to the world. He

gave His holy Law to Israel—after redeeming them from bondage in Egypt—to say, “This is how you can live under My blessing. This is how you can live to please Me.” We read that Law summarized in the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment reads:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20:8-11).

In what is the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments rooted or grounded? Creation—this is the pattern of how God made the world. Therefore you are to take one day in seven to rest. In Deuteronomy 5:15, God adds a second motivation:

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day (Deuteronomy 5:15).

What was the second motivation for keeping the Sabbath? Redemption—God redeemed you from slavery and made you His, therefore keep the Sabbath. As you listen to these motivations, does keeping the Sabbath sound like a burden or a blessing? Does it sound like drudgery or delight? God intended this to be a great blessing for His people and a witness to the rest of the world of God’s goodness and grace in their lives. The Sabbath was a beautiful gift, satisfying rhythm and wonderful tradition—a sacred law for God’s people to observe. By resting from their labors one day in seven they were demonstrating their trust, delight and hope in the Lord. They were looking forward to a greater day when He would come, restore His fallen creation and make this sin-ravaged world the abode of righteousness, peace and joy that it was originally intended to be. That’s what the Sabbath was—a blessing.

But God’s people did not always have clear vision. So in order to protect the Sabbath from desecration, people like the Pharisees added layers upon layers of commandments on top of the Sabbath commandment to make sure no one would ever break the Sabbath. They actually added 39 different categories of things you could not do on the Sabbath day. It had the effect of making it a great burden rather than a blessing.

Have you ever heard the saying: “Tradition is good; tradition is the living faith of the dead”? It’s the way we respect those who have gone before us and learn from history. But traditionalism is bad. “Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. It is traditionalism that gives tradition a bad name.” With the Pharisees of Jesus’ time, traditionalism had run amok and the Sabbath was one of the biggest ways

they bound people with their traditions. Listen to some of the things they said you could not do on the Sabbath:

- You could not travel more than eleven hundred paces. So if you were traveling, you had to count. If you got to 1,099, you had to stop or you would be breaking the law.
- You could not spit on the ground on the Sabbath, not because it was rude but because if the moisture dented the soil, the spitter was guilty of plowing. If a seed was there, he would also be guilty of sowing.
- You could only write a short word on the Sabbath but not a long one. So you had to stay away from writing ‘propitiation’ on the Sabbath.
- Healing was permitted only in life and death situations or to relieve extreme pain. So, if you had a withered hand, it could wait until after the Sabbath was over. They didn’t want to deal with that on the Sabbath. Not on a day that is for blessing! (From Daniel Doriani’s commentary on Matthew).
- Thankfully, if you were a woman who went into labor on the Sabbath, you were allowed to give birth!

That’s what brings us to the situation in Luke 6. The disciples were going through the grain fields, plucking and eating some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. There was nothing unlawful about this. The Law actually spelled out that they were permitted to do this. But the Pharisees defined this as reaping, which was work. Jesus answers them with a story from the Old Testament. Verse three says, “*Have you not read...*” “Don’t you guys read your Bibles?” He reminds them about David and his men who were fleeing from King Saul. David had been anointed the rightful king of Israel but Saul was still on the throne. In their flight, David and his men found themselves hungry in a lonely place. They met a priest who had the sacred bread of the Presence. That was all he had to offer them. Typically, this bread was only to be eaten by the priests. But in this situation, the presiding priest permitted David and his men to eat this bread. Nowhere does Scripture condemn either the priest or David for what he did. Why? In this case, the anointed king had a need that trumped the rituals and regulations that normally governed the temple.

Jesus is making this comparison between Himself and his disciples and David and his men. He is saying, “I am the promised Son of David. I am the rightful Heir to the throne of God’s Kingdom. I’m the Messiah and because of Who I am—the King, the Promised One—I have authority over how the Law of God is to be interpreted and applied.” In case they didn’t get it from the Old Testament story, Jesus says it very straightforwardly in verse five, “*The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.*”

The Pharisees had been missing the point of the Sabbath altogether in their zeal to make sure all the rules were being kept. They forgot it was designed to be a blessing for humanity. Their utter blindness is especially pronounced in the next episode in Luke 6:6. On another Sabbath, there was a man with a withered hand in the synagogue; he may have been there many times. His hand may have been paralyzed

or atrophied. The disability was humiliating and a great hardship for him. Look at how the Pharisees respond: with coldness, hardheartedness, total lack of compassion and mercy. It says they, "...*watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him...*" They must have been thinking, "We know Jesus likes to heal and bless people. Maybe we can catch Him breaking the Pharisees' law now. "*But he knew their thoughts...*" (verses 7-8).

Now Jesus comes. He always does. He knows what we're thinking and what is in our hearts when we go through our religious observances. The Pharisees had no sense of embarrassment or disproportion about how far their religion had strayed from the intention of God's law. No compassion or mercy. Here's a living opportunity to extend love and mercy to a broken, withered man and all they care about is trapping Jesus. Religion can become blinding. When rules become more important than relationships, something is off. When we care more about keeping the rules than caring for people, something has gone awry in our religion and understanding of God's will.

Imagine the drama of the scene as Jesus says in verse eight, "*Come and stand here.*" The man might be thinking, "I don't want to get up in front of all these people. I'm embarrassed." He gets up and stands there with his withered hand. Then Jesus questions him, "*I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it [kill it]?*" (verse nine). You can imagine him saying, "Kill it? Who said anything about killing, Jesus? Who said anything about destroying?" Jesus knew their thoughts and that the Pharisees were already plotting and scheming to get rid of Him. He says to the man with the withered hand, "*Stretch out your hand*" (verse ten). Jesus isn't doing any work here. All he is doing is talking. Through His word, he heals. The man does not doubt or say, "Stretch it out? It's withered. I can't do that." He stretches out his hand and the miracle of God's grace comes and invades that withered hand and makes it whole—restored, beautiful and functional again.

This is very similar to how God's Word comes to us when we're dead in our trespasses and sins. We cannot in ourselves respond to the gospel. But God says, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...*" (Acts 16:31). We believe and the miracle of grace happens. God saves us and makes us whole. You would think this would be the most exciting day ever in that synagogue—that they would be rejoicing and praising God. But what does it say they did? How did they respond? "*But they were filled with fury [filled with anger] and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus*" (Luke 6:11). That was their response. The shadow of the cross was already looming on the horizon and with this healing the shadow became darker and thicker. Jesus was on His way to death.

That tells a lot about the last question:

How is the Sabbath Appropriated?

Little did the Pharisees know that in plotting to kill Jesus all they would succeed in doing was making Him the Lord of the Sabbath—the One Who is able to bring true, deep, meaningful and eternal rest to the people of God. There are so many different ways to think about the gospel based on images God gives us in His Word. I wonder if you've ever thought about it from this angle: on that cross, Jesus was experiencing the eternal restlessness of soul that we deserve to experience for our sin.

Isaiah 57:20-21 says, *"But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked."* That is what we deserve to experience forever for our sins—to be tossed in the sea of turmoil and restlessness where there is no peace. But on the cross Jesus writhed in agony, enduring the wrath we deserved to bring us peace we could never achieve. When Jesus said, *"It is finished,"* He provided:

- The way for the troubled sea of our restless souls to be calmed with a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).
- To have the eternal murmur of a restless soul stilled.
- To have the weighty burden of God's wrath against sin removed.

Jesus did all of this on the cross. The Resurrection was the first day of a new creation—the beginning of an eternal Sabbath when all is well between God and His redeemed creation. There is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit—a new Heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells. The resurrection of Jesus was the dawning of that new creation.

Hebrews 4:3 addresses how we can appreciate the Sabbath today. It says, *"The promise of entering his rest still stands..."* God is offering a rest you can never find through your own labors. You could never achieve it for yourself. How do we enter that rest? Hebrews 4:3 says, *"For we who have believed enter that rest."* Believe the good news that Jesus came to be Lord of the Sabbath, to give you rest from the weariness of your own works and efforts to prove yourself. All your labors will ever prove is that you have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Through Christ's labor and restless writhing on the cross, He can deliver you from the murmuring of your self-reproach and eternal condemnation of God's Holy Law. He can free you from the restless bondage of trying to prove yourself.

Hebrews 4:9-10 say, *"So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."* Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath, brings rest to the weary, wholeness to the withered. When you *"confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:9). You are saved to enter an eternal Sabbath rest.

We still live in a fallen world and in frail, finite bodies. We're still waiting for the full realization of that Sabbath rest to dawn—for Jesus to return. So how practically can we experience this blessing of knowing the Lord of the Sabbath? I'm going to give three practical applications in ascending order of importance.

1. **Wisdom.** Take one day in seven to rest. It's built into your fabric as a created human being. Use wisdom and respect the need of others to do this as well. If you are an employer, make sure it is built into your company and the way you treat your employees. If you're dealing on teams with people, make sure you are respecting others' need to rest. There's nothing heroic or godly about working nonstop. In fact, it probably stems from a lack of trust in the Lord—thinking that you need to justify your existence by what you do.

There is nothing godly about idleness either. *“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God”* (Exodus 20:9-10). So use wisdom in recognizing that to rest is part of being created and human.

2. **The Lord's Day.** Sunday is the Lord's Day. I want to be very careful not to lord it over your conscience as to how to think about the application of this truth. I don't think this is the main point of what we need to believe here. However, there are differences among serious Bible believers about the relationship between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. There is a lot to be explored here. Let me tell you what my thinking is presently on this subject: I am not persuaded that the fourth commandment has been so fulfilled in Christ that it is no longer binding on believers today. I believe all the Ten Commandments are binding on us when received through Christ, including the fourth commandment. I am persuaded as long as we agree that it is fulfilled in Christ we can trust one another to be led by the Holy Spirit in the way we observe the Lord's Day.

I also think if our main question about Sunday is: “What is it that I can and cannot do on Sunday?” and “What should so-and-so be doing on Sunday?” then we are acting like the Pharisees and missing the point. It's not about what you can and cannot do but about what you get to do. The blessing of the Lord's Day is not a means of judging other Christians. But I would encourage you to prayerfully consider how you can use this day to its maximum potential. If the Old Testament Israelites were to call the Sabbath a delight, how can you make the Lord's Day a delight for your family and yourself? What do you need to do to set aside this day from the normal cares of work?

On this point, my family will say, “Physician, heal thyself.” Should I be thinking about turning off my cell phone or email and setting aside my normal work for this day in order to be refreshed in the presence of God with His people? Should I enjoy the Lord, get some rest, go outside and take a great walk and enjoy creation and be a blessing to others who might need the mercy ministry that I’m too busy to give on other days of the week? How can I turn this day into an expression of trust in the Lord of the Sabbath? How can I delight in Him?

I love how John Piper puts it. He says,

The Sabbath is just a shadow—Christ is the Reality. But the Shadow remains because Christ has not yet returned. We taste the final rest only in part as we trust in Christ ... The shadow of Christ across this weary world still offers shade, namely, the first day of the week—the Lord’s Day.

Think and pray about that and do something about it as the Lord leads you.

3. *"In quietness and in trust shall be your strength"* (Isaiah 30:15). Do you need rest? Go to Jesus!

You have to go to Him Who endured the restlessness of your sin upon the cross so you could enter into God’s rest. An old hymn says:

Weary, working, burdened one,
Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing; all was done
Long, long ago.

Till to Jesus’ work you cling
By a simple faith,
“Doing” is a deadly thing—
“Doing” ends in death.

It is finished! yes, indeed,
Finished, ev’ry jot;
Sinner, this is all you need,
Tell me, is it not?

Cast your deadly “doing” down—
Down at Jesus’ feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete.

(It is Finished! by Ira D. Sankey)

If you’ve gone to Jesus for rest and you are feeling that you don’t know how to rest or enjoy it, the Lord’s Table can be a great means of grace to your heart. To say, “Find rest my soul in God alone.” For all who trust in Jesus, He invites you to come to this communion table and worship Him. For those who do not know the rest from the labors of trying to prove yourself to God or are trusting in your own righteousness to save you, Jesus issues a wonderful invitation.

The same incident that we read in Luke is in Matthew 12. Right before this incident in Matthew is a wonderful invitation from Jesus our Savior. This is what Jesus wants us to experience in Him. Listen to your Savior call and invite you:

'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden [Come to me, Jesus says], and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart [not like the Pharisees were], and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-29).

Because He bore the heavy burden, now He gives us the light joy of walking side-by-side with Him. He'll teach and lead us in God's way. It will always be a way that brings rest to our souls. Believers, put your trust in Jesus. Come to Him right now.

My soul finds rest in God alone
My rock and my salvation
A fortress strong against my foes
And I will not be shaken
Though lips may bless and hearts
may curse
And lies like arrows pierce me
I'll fix my heart on righteousness
I'll look to Him who hears me

O praise Him hallelujah
My Delight and my Reward
Everlasting never failing
My Redeemer my God

Find rest my soul in God alone
Amid the world's temptations
When evil seeks to take a hold
I'll cling to my salvation
Though riches come and riches go
Don't set your heart upon them
The fields of hope in which I sow
Are harvested in heaven

I'll set my gaze on God alone
And trust in Him completely
With ev'ry day pour out my soul
And He will prove His mercy
Though life is but a fleeting breath
A sigh too deep to measure
My King has crushed the curse of
death
And I am His forever

O praise Him hallelujah
My Delight and my Reward
Everlasting never failing
My Redeemer my God

O praise Him, O praise Him
Hallelujah, hallelujah
O praise Him, O praise Him
Hallelujah, hallelujah
O praise Him, O praise Him
Hallelujah, hallelujah

(Psalm 62 by Aaron Keyes)

New Covenant Bible Church

[4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175](http://www.newcbc.org)

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net