Luke Lesson 18 (2019)

**LORD OF THE SABBATH**

Luke 6:1-11

Key Verse: 6:5

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’”

“Lord of the Sabbath…” What does Jesus mean when he said that he is Lord of the Sabbath? It means that he is God. Ever since Jesus launched his messianic ministry, people could experience powerful demonstrations of God’s love and mercy through his teaching and healing ministry. People were amazed because Jesus performed miracles, which only God could do, including the healing of leprosy and the paralyzed (5:12-26). Yet, his teaching didn’t necessarily please most Jewish religious leaders. When Jesus proclaimed that he had the authority on earth to forgive man’s sins, his statement not only offended them but they also condemned him as a blasphemer, saying, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (5:21) They were even more offended by Jesus because he didn’t seem to follow their doctrines and religious traditions at all.

In last week’s passage, Jesus clearly declared that his coming brings a new beginning to this world, breaking away from a thousand-year old Jewish religious traditions. He said, “No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.” (5:38) In today’s passage, we see that Jesus is opposed by the Jewish religious leaders in two separate occasions, with the same subject of keeping the Sabbath. They tried to accuse him of violating the Sabbath. Jesus defended himself: he demonstrated what keeping the Sabbath was supposed to be and declared that he is Lord of the Sabbath, therefore God.

Look at verses 1 and 2. “One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain-fields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, ‘Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?’” According to the fourth of the Ten Commandments, the Jews were to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (Ex. 20:8). They were told to do all the work during six days, but on the seventh day they were not supposed to do any work because it was a Sabbath to the Lord their God. The Pharisaic movement, which had become the most predominant Jewish sect in Jesus time, started after the Jews returned from the exile. After their long captivity in Babylon (70 years), the Jews, particularly orthodox Jews, seriously considered why God punished them. They concluded that they were chastised because of their disobedience to the law of God. The Pharisees were extremely zealous for the law of God. Psalm 119:33-36 states, “Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.” If the Pharisees had heard this psalm, they would have said, **“Amen!”**

In the area of Sabbath observance, the Pharisees had made a large number of rules which prohibited 39 major activities, including planting, plowing, reaping, building, sewing, writing, cooking, etc. Why did they make so many rules? It was to obey the law of God more effectively. Unfortunately, however, their devotion to the law of God was so extreme that instead of obeying the Law itself, they ended up following numerous tiny rules and regulations concerning the Sabbath observance. They kept letters but lost the spirit of the law. In my apartment building complex I have Jewish neighbors. On one Saturday afternoon, one of conservative Jewish friends stood by elevator and asked me if I could push the button for him. I was more than willing to do it. I guess pushing the button on the Sabbath was considered as work.

According to the Pharisees, Jesus’ disciples picking heads of grains and rubbing them in their hands was violation of the Sabbath observation. However, what Jesus’ disciples did was not against the law of God if it was not done on the Sabbath. In fact, Deuteronomy 23:25 states, “If you enter your neighbor’s grain-field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.” As long as you don’t use a sickle, it’s okay to pick some grains, rub and eat the kernels. But the Pharisees considered all these activities inappropriate for the Sabbath. To most of us, it was a silly accusation, but to the Pharisees the disciples’ failure to keep their Sabbath rules was directly disobedient to the law of God.

How did Jesus defend his disciples? Jesus referred to the incident of David in 1 Samuel 21:1-9. Look at verses 3 and 4. “Jesus answered them, ‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 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.’” At that time, God anointed David. But he had to flee for his life from King Saul who was jealous of him. When David and his friends were hungry, they went to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech the priest didn’t have any ordinary bread on hand, so he gave David the consecrated bread, which was lawful only for priests to eat. David not only ate the consecrated bread but he also shared it with his friends. Apparently, the Pharisees had read the story of David. And they knew the Scripture did not condemn David for what he did.

So, what is Jesus’ point in reminding them of the story of David? His first point is that human need should override legalism or any kind of ceremonial tradition. As a matter of fact, Jesus said in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Therefore, what Jesus’ disciples did on that Sabbath was not contrary to the divine intent of the law of God, so the Pharisees should not have condemned them for what they did. The Pharisees insisted that man must conform himself to the law and regulations no matter what the inconvenience or need. But what Jesus was saying is that man is more important in the eyes of God than any ritual observance.

But Jesus didn’t leave it there. He proclaimed his divine authority as God by saying in verse 5, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Earlier when he healed the paralyzed man, Jesus claimed his divine authority by saying, “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” This time is the second claim of his divine authority as God. Jesus was saying that he was not violating the Sabbath by doing what he did, but he had the right to do so because he is Lord of the Sabbath. He is above all the law, including the law of the Sabbath.

The English word “Sabbath” is derived from the Hebrew word **“Shabbat-** *שַׁבָּת‎* [***[ʃa'bat]***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA/Hebrew)***”*,** which means “to cease, to end or to rest.” It’s a day of rest. God knows that our life in this troubled world is full of stress and burdens. So, he made the day of rest so that we can remember His wonderful creation and celebrate it. We need to work hard, but we also need to rest properly. We need to rest physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Otherwise, we will get burnt out. Yet, the problem is that most people don’t know how to rest properly. People may have different reasons for their restlessness: biological, medical, emotional, psychological, relational or spiritual causes. Also, some people are restless because they don’t allow themselves to rest, believing that they should always work hard. Otherwise, they feel guilty. They may work hard, but they don’t have real joy, rest and peace. They believe in doing rather than being with God our Father. Sabbath is to be with God. As a matter of fact, Jesus said to his disciples, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Mt. 11:28-30) The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Are you with the Lord? Are you resting in the arms of the Lord? (Pic#1,2)

Look at verses 6-11. In this section, we see another aspect of the Sabbath. Look at verses 6 and 7. “On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 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.” It seems that Jesus faithfully attended the worship on the Sabbath. Whenever he went to the synagogue, he taught the word of God. This shows that sharing God’s word was his priority in ministry. While Jesus was teaching God’s words, a man whose right hand was shriveled was there.

The Pharisees were certain that they had the case for themselves, predicting that on that Sabbath Jesus would surely heal the man. To them, doing virtually anything on the Sabbath was unlawful. But Jesus, by healing the man on the Sabbath, proved that the attitude of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law was wrong. Look at verses 8 and 9. “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. 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?’” The obvious answer was of course to do good and to save life on the Sabbath. But the Pharisees refused to answer. In fact, they were not concerned about the man with the shriveled hand at all. They wouldn’t do anything for this poor man. Instead, they only wanted to make use of this poor guy as bait to capture Jesus.

Look at verse 10. “He looked around at them, and then said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He did so, and his hand was completely healed.” We are not sure whether the man was purposely planted by the Pharisees to capture Jesus or not. Perhaps, the man whose right hand was shriveled wanted to hide his shriveled hand from others. It was most unlikely that he would like to attend the service at synagogue on the Sabbath because he didn’t want people to see his shriveled hand. It was his painful secret. He didn’t want to be hurt by insensitive people’s remarks and comments on him. Jesus knew all this. Yet, he challenged the man to get up and stand in front of everyone, then to stretch out his hand. It was a huge challenge for this man.

Why would Jesus heal him in such way? It’s because Jesus wanted to heal the man not just physically but emotionally, mentally and spiritually as well. And this man obeyed Jesus’ command and his hand was completely restored. The immediate healing the man experienced was physical, but the healing continued in him until he was healed emotionally, mentally and spiritually. How beautiful and wholesome it is! We like to put on masks. But most of us have a shriveled hand which we don’t want people to see. So, we hide it. However, unless we stretch it out to Jesus, we may not experience Jesus’ complete healing in our soul. Stretching our shriveled hand is an act of our faith.

By healing the man on the Sabbath, Jesus demonstrated that the Pharisees were wrong before God for doing nothing on the Sabbath. Instead, it is absolutely right for us to do good and to save life on the Sabbath. We, as Christians, don’t keep the Sabbath. Sunday is the Lord’s Day. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, which means we can always find rest in Jesus, being with him and he with us, and we are to show our love toward our neighbors as an expression of our love for God.

Look at verse 11. “But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.” In fact, Jesus didn’t use even a finger or any tool, except his words, to heal the man. It was a demonstration of his divine power and authority as the Son of God. People who saw this man being healed completely became so amazed and said, *“Praise God!”* Yet, Jewish religious leaders hardened their hearts and became furious. They could have humbled themselves and accepted Jesus. But they didn’t. Instead, they began to discuss among themselves how to get rid of Jesus, so that they could continue to maintain their status quo. They turned away from the living God. They chose religion over the living God. How sad!

Let me close the sermon. I’ve been a Christian for the last 44 years, nearly a half century, and that’s dangerous. Through this passage, I learned that it’s easy for any of us to remain habitual and institutionalized by man-made religious traditions. Living a religious life can be a lot easier than to truly follow the living God, which requires constant spiritual struggle. Due to many burdens and difficulties in life, it’s easy for us to harden our hearts and choose religion over the living God. If you feel comfortable with your religious life now, you might be in spiritual danger. In fact, we are to choose between the living God and religion. If we choose the living God over religion, Jesus, the living God, dwells in us, and we will experience freedom, joy, and rest from the burden of life. May we fix our eyes on Jesus, the living God and the Lord of the Sabbath and have the utmost joy of knowing Him more and more.