

Luke 6:1-11

The Problem With Religion

One of the main objections to faith in a personal God that skeptics often raise is the atrocities done in the name of religion. It might be terrorism and murder in the name of Allah in the Sudan today, the Holocaust in Germany in the 1940's, or the Crusades in the 13th century and the Spanish inquisition of the 15th century.

The question is asked, "what kind of God do people worship? If there is a God and this is what he's like then who wants to know Him?"

Of course, once you begin to read the Bible you realize the fallacy of that kind of reasoning. That's judging God by what people make him out to be, rather than as he really is.

The greatest hindrance to God's ministry in this world is often the very people who claim to be his followers.

And the reason they become a hindrance is man's bent toward perverting the truth of God and making it man's system of traditions and rules. Man loves to get his hands on the things of God and distort and twist them to his own liking. The message of the Bible clearly shows how this happens over and over again. Man takes God's truth, distorts and perverts it, and what is left is a system that oppresses people instead of ministering to them.

In our study of the life and ministry of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke we find the theme of Luke's gospel is in Jesus' words in Luke 5:32: "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*" Today we begin Luke 6. **Turn to Luke 6 pg 997.**

This brings us to Jesus' eighteenth month of public ministry, starting in the southern desert of Judea, to Jerusalem, and then moving up into the villages of Galilee.

Using "A Harmony of the Gospels," which is a book that lines up the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John chronologically, we can see that this particular story is found in the first three gospels, but not in John.

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus went up to Jerusalem (Luke 5 and 6) to attend either the Feast of Pentecost between May and June, or the Feast of

Tabernacles, between September and October. During this time he healed a lame man sitting by the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. John 5 says, "And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them [the Pharisees], 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.' For this cause, therefore, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

At this point two capital offenses were leveled at Jesus. First, they said he was a "Sabbath breaker," which according to Exodus 31:15 was punishable by stoning. Secondly, he was a blasphemer because he was saying that he was equal with God, which is dealt with in Leviticus 24:11-16.

According to Matthew 12, we know that the context of Luke 6 is a time when the Lord and his disciples were ministering throughout Galilee. People were coming to know Jesus as Messiah, and the sick, disabled, and demon-possessed were being healed. Walking between villages, the hungry men came alongside a ripe field of grain. In any busy ministry, it is easy to forget to eat...

Read Verse 1

Up until this time Jesus has ministered to people and some have believed in him and some haven't.

But there hasn't been any outright opposition of Christ. No one has tried to stop him, and keep him from ministering. No one's openly opposed him.

But now we find a change. A group of men begin to plot a way to kill Christ and silence him forever.

And interestingly enough this group of men turns out to be the Pharisees. The religious leadership in Israel.

There's probably a historical reason why the gospel shifts to the conflict between Christ and the men at this point. And that's because a number of important, recent historical events had taken place.

First, there had been a shift in the policy of Rome toward the Jewish nation that had greatly sharpened the danger of insurrections and war.

The anti-semitic Roman commander Sejanus, working thru Pilate, stripped the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body, of its power over capital crimes.

The Sanhedrin had to abandon the Great Hall of Hewed Stone in the temple court and move as a body to the Market of Annas on the temple mount. We can see the result of this change a year or so later when the Sanhedrin was compelled to come to Pilate seeking the death penalty in the case of Jesus.

Second, because of this increase in Roman oppression the zealots, who were the cloke and dagger Jewish freedom fighters, became more active.

This causes the more pessimistic rabbis to predict a time of great persecution and suffering.

Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai prophesied the future destruction of the temple.

Rabbi Zadok began a 40 year partial fast for the preservation of Jerusalem which didn't end until Titus and his Roman army finally destroyed the city.

In this time of so much turmoil and political hostility and oppression it's no wonder that the leaders of Judaism reacted to Jesus as a new and potentially dangerous figure.

But in Luke 6 things really start to heat up. Jesus comes down with both feet on one of the most blatant misinterpretations of God's word that Judaism had come up with.

And that was the Sabbath day. **Read vs 2**

The Law of Moses was filled with commands. Some of them were specifically designed to show God's love and mercy. For instance, Deuteronomy 23:24 *"When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container. When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain."*

Jesus' disciples were merely living out that aspect of the Law when ate grain. The problem was they choose to do it on the Sabbath day.

God had commanded a Sabbath for the Jewish people, but the leaders had perverted it by transforming it into a system by which they thought they were earning God's favor by good works.

The command to observe the Sabbath is found in the 10 commandments.

Go with me to Exodus 20 and we'll see exactly what God said there.

Exodus 20:8 - 11 Pg 71

God told his people - Israel that the last day of the week was to be a day of rest. The last day of the Jewish week is Saturday; actually it starts at sundown Friday and ends at sundown Saturday.

The English words Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *shabbath* which means "rest". One day of the week was to be a day in which nobody worked but everybody rested.

Now turn to Exodus 31:12-17.

Notice, at least 4 times God said this is a sign between me and the people of Israel. It was a rest day that was to be kept holy, or literally "separated" from the other days of the week, and it was based upon the fact that God rested on the 7th day of the creation week.

By the way - this should clear up any questions about whether the "days" of Genesis one are literal days or just periods of time.

Over and over again were told that the days of creation correspond to the days of the week and that God rested on the 7th day and that is why the Jews were to do the same.

The Hebrew words for Day *yowm* is never used anywhere else with numerical designation (1st, 2nd, 3rd) to refer to anything other than literal solar days.

The question, of course, isn't how did God create everything in 6 days, as if that was a short time for him, but why did he choose to take 6 days to do what he could have done instantly.

One of the reasons was because of the Sabbath day and what he wanted to show

Israel by it and what He wants us to see today.

On the 7th day God rested.

Now, God never rested because he was tired.

Isa. 40:28 says: *The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary*

On the 7th day God rested, not from fatigue, but because His creative work was finished.

Now when He gave the command to Israel to rest and not work what He was really doing was putting them to the test.

The 4th Commandment was totally unlike any of the other 9. It had nothing to do with morality or ethics.

The Sabbath commandment tested the Jews to see if they would believe that God could provide for them if they didn't work one day a week. Remember they all lived off the land when this commandment was given. No one got a pay check.

And if you think that was a test look at this. **Turn to Leviticus 25 pg 117.**

Read vs 1-7 - Not only was there to be a 7th day of rest but there was also to be a seventh year of rest and then every 50th year was a year of Jubilee and again there was no sowing or reaping.

Read vs. 18 - 22

God said "you keep my commandments as my special beloved people and I'll bless your land until you have so much food, you'll never go hungry that 7th year.

This was the same lesson as the weekly Sabbath - just on a larger scale.

The whole sabbath concept was a day of showing the Israelites that they could rest in God's faithfulness.

Now turn to Deut. 5 pg 171

In Deuteronomy Moses repeats God's law to a new generation of Israelites.

deuteros means second
nomos means law

So Deuteronomy means "the 2nd law" or "the 2nd giving of the law."

Read 5:12 -15

Moses is saying "You were slaves in Egypt and God took you out and set you free. He provided for you and met our needs. God is trustworthy. Now keep the sabbath day as a perpetual reminder of God's faithfulness."

Where do we find rest? Where do we find real peace? Only in the God of peace. God was showing his people that they could trust him and participate in his rest. That was what the Sabbath was all about.

Now as we come back to Jesus time we see that any idea of God's faithfulness and rest were long since forgotten. Instead of being a provision for man, Judaism had turned it into nothing but a series of man's do's and don'ts.

The Law of God was a series of wide principles which men were left to apply and carry out. But through the years the Jews had made it into thousands and thousands of regulations and rules. This is an occupational hazard of faith: turning a relationship with God into a religion.

The law simply said the Sabbath day must be different from other days and on it no one, including servants and animals can work.

Alford Ed Ershimeton in his book "Life and times of Jesus the Messiah" has pages of fine print giving examples of the talmudic sabbath laws. And commenting on the Jewish Talmud he says "in not less than 24 chapters, (on the Sabbath) matters are seriously discussed as of vital religious importance, which one could scarcely imagine a sane intellect would seriously entertain."

The Rabbis determined that a burden was defined by the weight of a dried fig. So you couldn't carry anything that weighed more than a dried fig.

One big question was, if you carried something that weighed 1/2 a dried fig and put it down and picked it up again was that equal to carrying a whole fig and

therefore wrong?

Well, that all depended on where you were and what you were doing.

If you threw a piece of food up in the air with your hand and caught it in the same hand - that was working on the Sabbath. If you caught it with the other hand there was some debate but if you caught it in your mouth and ate it you were OK.

If you spit on the Sabbath day and your saliva lands on the ground in a little puddle you were ok but if it hit the ground and made a little furrow that was considered plowing and was work.

A woman wasn't to look in a mirror because if she saw a gray hair she might be tempted to pull it out and do labor.

We think this is funny, it sounds absurd to us. But to the Rabbis of Jesus day it was a life and death matter.

Being right with God might depend on where you spit on Saturday.

See what perversion man can make of the simplest of God's commands!

Back to Luke 6 Read vs 3-5

Matthew 12 also records this incident but Matthew gives us even a little more information. He lets us know that Jesus also said this: *Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.*

In Jesus's answer as to why his disciples did what was considered harvesting grain on the sabbath there are 3 important principles.

The first is his reference to David. Every Jew knew the story Jesus referred to. David had been anointed by God to be King over the people but they had rejected him and followed his rebellious son Absalom instead.

David was forced to flee from Jerusalem for his life. He had no food, and so he and his followers entered the tabernacle and took the showbread, or "the bread of presentation" that was always there and ate it.

Everybody knew that only priests were allowed to enter the holy place. Only

priests could eat that bread.

But God allowed David to do this. Why? The explanation is that God considered the anointing of David to be more important than the Law of the bread. And it was useless and hypocritical for the people to be pretending to serve God through the minute laws of the tabernacle worship when they were rejecting God's king.

It's an insult to God to act out religious ritual when your heart is far from Him. Ritual isn't all bad, but ritual without reality is bad.

The parallel to Jesus Day is obvious. The Scribes and Pharisees insisted on their little sabbath rules while they were actually turning their back on God's anointed. God's Messiah. God's Christ.

There He was! He was greater than the temple. So if they rejected Him, even the Sabbath, backed up by Old Testament Law was meaningless.

The 2nd principle in Jesus's answer is that man's religion actually blinds people to the real need. He says, you don't understand God's statement from the prophet Hosea. *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice."*

As you read further in Matthew 12 you find this reaction: Verse 14 says *"the Pharisees went out and took counsel together against him, how they might destroy him."*

Notice how Luke's account progresses. Read vs 6-11

How easy it would have been for our Lord to avoid this conflict. He could have privately instructed the man to meet Him at another time or at another place, so as to avoid the attack of the Pharisees.

The issue which Jesus wished to raise was the purpose of the precept. Why was the Sabbath Law given? The Pharisees concentrated on the negatives, on the "Don'ts" of life. Jesus focused on the positives.

Here were men being meticulous in the observance of their interpretation of God's law and yet they were determined to kill Jesus for not obeying their regulations.

Not only that but they would even try to keep their own regulations while doing it. The crucifixion took place at Passover and these same men made sure they didn't

go into Pilate's judgment hall because that would defile them and prohibit them from eating the passover.

James Boice says, "They marched along the little path of their own regulations. When it was necessary they stepped out just enough to murder God. Then they stepped back in and went on with their formalism."

That's the horror of empty ritual. Sure the crusades and the inquisition were carried out in the name of Christ. The Holocaust in Germany was too. But they didn't have anything to do with the real Christ anymore than the religion of the Pharisees had anything to do with the real Jehovah God of the Bible.

There's also a 3rd principle in Luke.

The 3rd principal was stated by Jesus back in vs 5. Whatever the Sabbath was all about, he was Lord of the Sabbath. He was the one who established the Sabbath. He is God. He could alter, suspend, remove, do whatever He wanted to do with the Sabbath.

They wanted to pile up their human credits rather than to allow Jesus to be Lord. And isn't that the danger we all face. Its easier to keep a few rules than to allow Jesus to manifest His lordship in our lives.

These religious men of Jesus day missed a great lesson that God was teaching through the Sabbath. They even got the crucifixion over by noontime to avoid breaking the Sabbath.

They did a complete "180" and turned what God was saying into a way to have confidence in their works, when God wanted them to have confidence in Him.

What about us today? Does God want us to keep the Sabbath? There are many church groups that would say, "Yes. We are bound by God's law to observe a Saturday Sabbath." And then others put a little variation on that and say, "The Sabbath was changed to Sunday but, we're still obligated to keep it. After all its one of the 10 commandments."

It seems like today people are just as apt to miss the point of the Sabbath as they were in Jesus' day.

Remember the Saturday Sabbath wasn't given as a day of worship but as a day *shabbath* "rest." By the time of Christ the Jews were worshipping in synagogues on Saturday. But that wasn't because God told them to. They started that on their own after the days of Ezra.

Not only that but God never gave the Sabbath command to anybody but the Jewish people. It wasn't given to the Romans or to the Greeks but to the Jews. Remember Exodus 31:2 *"This shall be a sign between me and the children of Israel."*

People argue, it was in the 10 commandments, obviously we are obliged to keep it. But that is another misunderstanding. The 10 commandments were not given to anybody but the Jewish people either. The Mosaic Covenant was made with Israel not Gentiles.

Now, does that mean that the 10 commandments are bad, or that they have nothing to say to us?

Not at all. The law was holy and just and good. As far as God's standards go, many of the Old Testament commands are repeated within the framework of the New Testament concept of grace. In fact 9 of the 10 commandments are repeated as NT admonitions.

There's only one that's not. Guess which one that is. The Sabbath is the only one that is not repeated in the New Testament.

That's because thou shalt not kill, or thou shalt not steal are timeless principals that are always a violation of God's standards. They always were and always will be. They were wrong before God articulated them in the 10 commandments and they always will be wrong.

The Sabbath command was different. Its the only one that wasn't a moral command.

That's why in the New Testament epistles instead of commands being given to keep the Sabbath there are warnings about anyone thinking they are some how bound to it. It's not Sunday, its Saturday and there is no binding obligation to observe it.

That's because the reality of what the Sabbath was designed to teach about confidence in God is found in Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews says in chapter 4. *“For we who have believed do enter that rest...For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: And God rested on the seventh day from all His works. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.”*

The word for “rest” is *Sabbatismos* - literally “a Sabbath rest.” On the 7th day, and thru the Sabbath commandments, God was picturing the rest that we can only enter by faith. It is the perfect Sabbath, perfect rest made possible by the perfect work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

How blind they were in Jesus day. So many failed to enter into God’s salvation rest because they got so hung up on the picture they were blinded to the reality.

God forbid that should happen here today. There remains a rest for the people of God. It is still open in this day of grace.

God rested on the 7th day from all His labors because He was finished with His creative work.

Today Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father because He’s finished with His redemptive work.

And He says, “Now come. Believe that I died for you and I will give you rest.”

What’s the problem with religion? Religion focuses on what people can do to earn acceptance from God. Religion blinds people to what God has done in Christ.

The Biblical God calls to have a relationship with Him by faith. It’s a relationship based on His peace that comes from knowing our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ.