

## REIGNS Luke 6:1-11

We sometimes lose our sense of priority with regard to the real needs of people. Jesus ran into that very problem in His day. Usually, these problems were with the religious leaders who were more concerned about the rituals of their religion than the reality of what God cares about. As a result, they missed the very things they should have been concerned about.

Are misplaced priorities a problem in today's church, our nation, businesses, and even in families? How is our "religion" or our belief expressed in our lives? Is it only in going to church twice or three times a week? What impact are we having on the world around us as a result of being a follower of Christ?

Thirty years ago, we could find people who were non-Christians who were usually very complimentary of Jesus. They might say: "I don't believe that He was the Messiah, and I don't believe that He was the Son of God, but Jesus was certainly a great person. He was a great teacher. Maybe He was a prophet." Today, generally find non-Christians who are openly hostile toward Jesus. This stance is similar to that of the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders toward Jesus two thousand years ago. These groups share a common hatred for Jesus and for common reasons.

When we see such hatred in the Scripture accounts, we wonder, why did these people have such hostility toward Jesus?

The gospel accounts tell us that Jesus drew large crowds that listened to Him. He was profoundly popular among the people and offered them hope and healing. In contrast to this, the Jewish rulers laid heavy burdens on the people. Jesus showed compassion to the people and all they got from their leaders was contempt. Jesus showed respect (and love) to the common people while the Pharisees and scribes considered them to be deplorable. We could conclude that the so-called leaders were jealous of Him. They saw Jesus associating with the common people and saw them cheering Him, loving Him. They couldn't stand it because they were envious and suspicious of His popularity.

Another reason they hated Jesus was because He exposed them by revealing their hypocrisy. Up until this time the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes set the moral standards for the community. They sat in places of honor in the synagogue. They were the ones who were most honored and celebrated for their virtue, but Jesus taught that their virtue was only a facade. He essentially told them, "You pretend to be righteous, and everything you do just adds to that facade of being righteous."

A third factor influencing their hatred was fear of the Romans who might use the power of Rome to crush the entire nation if all the populism stirred up by Jesus led to a civil revolt by groups like the Zealots. They probably thought that all the followers of Christ were radical and dangerous zealots that needed to be controlled. It is ironic that it was their (the religious elites) own actions that did eventually result in destructive action by Rome that concluded some forty years later.

### Work on the Sabbath? – 6:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain. <sup>2</sup> But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Luke 6:1-2 (NASB95)

In this account related by Matthew, Mark, and Luke we find the disciples of Jesus passing through fields of grain. The literal translation of "a Sabbath" is "the second first

Sabbath” which is seen in some translations. Apparently, there were three “first” or “prime” Sabbaths on the Jewish calendar that were associated with the three main celebrations of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (first, second and third). So, the second prime Sabbath would be associated with Pentecost which was the celebration of the grain harvest. Obviously, the grain was ripe and the Law of Moses specifically allowed pulling grain with the hand from a field that belonged to someone else; however, you could not use a sickle on your neighbor’s grain.

The religious leaders were not accusing the disciples of stealing but were concerned with the observance of the Sabbath. By their definition, the disciples were harvesting and threshing the grain. Their exaggerated interpretation of the law had many specific restrictions about what could or could not be done, how far one could walk, etc. Jesus answered their question with a question of His own regarding something that happen in the Old Testament.

### Lord of the Sabbath – 6:3-5

<sup>3</sup> And Jesus answering them said, “Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, <sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?” <sup>5</sup> And He was saying to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Luke 6:3–5 (NASB95)

By a strict interpretation of the law, what David had done “broke the law” of who could eat the shew bread. However, because David’s actions were motivated by mercy and caring for his men in a time of real need, the act was overlooked. Not even the Pharisees would accuse David of being a law breaker in this case. I would seem to a reasonable person that what the disciples were doing was much less an infraction of a man-made rule than what David did to a law that came from God.

If they were willing to excuse David, then why were they so unwilling to excuse the disciples of Jesus? The answer is that the Pharisees and other “religious” leaders had an agenda. They recognized that Jesus was popular with the common people and their agenda was to discredit anything and everything He (or anyone associated with Him) did. We might say that these “Heresy Hunters” were the “Religiously Correct” crowd of their day.

Jesus’ disciples had just been criticized for pulling and eating some grain from a field on the Sabbath. According to the Pharisees, they had broken the rules for resting on the Sabbath. Jesus logically defended what they did and referred to an Old Testament situation where human need was given priority over religious observance. The Pharisees were not interested in using logic to make judgements about a situation. They had rules and you just follow the rules whether the rules make any sense in a particular situation or not. The only excused ignoring the letter of the law was when (or if) it applied to themselves. All of us probably know good, morally upright people who have this same philosophy. One of the behaviors that typically go along with such ideas is that of carefully watching to see who breaks the rules. They are quick to point out the rule-breakers and to criticize.

We can be too “religious” to be practical in living life. We want to obey God’s commands and please Him in all that we do. However, we must be careful that we do not substitute certain ritualistic observances for true obedience. In Matthew’s account of this incident, Jesus summed it up well in telling the Pharisees to learn the meaning of “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” God wants us to love Him above all, to love our neighbor as ourselves and to move to the point that we can love our fellow Christians with the same kind of love that Jesus showed.

Jesus gave witness to the Pharisee of His true identity. He essentially told them He was

God. He had instituted the Sabbath and He knew what it meant. He did not need them to tell Him what it was about.

### Do Good on the Sabbath – 6:6-11

<sup>6</sup> On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. <sup>7</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him. <sup>8</sup> But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come forward!” And he got up and came forward. <sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?” <sup>10</sup> After looking around at them all, He said to him, “Stretch out your hand!” And he did so; and his hand was restored. <sup>11</sup> But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus. Luke 6:6–11 (NASB95)

Critics will be around and sometimes they will create situations that lead to opportunities to criticize the church of Jesus. The man with a withered hand may have been brought there by the Pharisees. In Matthew’s account of this incident, they posed a question to Jesus that has an obvious answer to us: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?” This question was actually a trap. If Jesus said “No,” then His critics would say that He didn’t care about people. If Jesus said “Yes,” then they would accuse Him of disregarding the Sabbath. When you think about it, life itself is full of such conflicts. There are two good things from which to choose and you can’t pick one without nullifying the other. So, what is a person to do? You make judgements and try to pick the best alternative that will cause the greater good.

One might ask, “Is God pleased if we observe the Sabbath?” In general, the answer would be “Yes.” We might ask, “Is God pleased if we help a person in need when we have the resources to help?” Again, the answer has to be “Yes.” Now, let’s ask “What pleases Him more?” There is no contest.

In Matthew’s account, Jesus showed how ridiculous the Pharisees were in their pettiness by asking them what they would do for a farm animal in distress. Surely, a person is more important than a farm animal. According to Luke, He then asked them a more general question that went beyond the question of healing. “Is it lawful to do good or do harm on the Sabbath days, to save a life or destroy it?” They refused to answer Him.

We still see this refusal to address the real issue of life among those who are against Christ. When a logical answer to a question would have exposed their false assumptions and beliefs was posed to them, they changed the subject and refused to answer.

Jesus then proceeded to heal the man with the withered hand to demonstrate His answer to the question. The Pharisees should have fallen down before Him in worship since Jesus had again showed His awesome power that not only validated His ministry but was convincing evidence of His divinity. They didn't do that. Instead, they left plotting how they might kill Him.

I guess the religious legalists would insist that Jesus did not live a sinless life since He healed a person on the Sabbath Day.

Summary: The entire question regarding observing the Sabbath is put into perspective by the statement that Jesus made regarding the Sabbath that Mark recorded in connection with the grain incident. “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” The Jews had enslaved themselves to the idea of the Sabbath and as such had made it a god. God, our Creator, Who instituted the Sabbath, did not intend that the Sabbath should become a tyrant that people had to serve. On the other hand, we need to be careful that we do not swing the pendulum too far in the direction of not treating it as a special day. Some tend to treat the Sabbath in a “business as usual” fashion.

God instituted the Sabbath, making provision for people's needs. We can ignore our needs to have a day of rest and we will be the one to suffer for it. Both our mental and physical health will suffer if we do not take into account the need we have to withdraw from the routineness of life and take a break. Not only can we avoid some negative consequences, we can use this special day in a positive fashion to draw closer to God and seek to know His way and will for our lives. In doing so we will be better able to access His wisdom and power and creativity in our lives.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) authored a thorough commentary on the Scriptures and in this work we find an observation that may aptly apply to our present study.

*Summum jus est summa injuria*

“The law stretched into rigor becomes unjust.”