

# JESUS IS 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.’”**

In today’s passage there are two events related to the Sabbath. The Sabbath is one of God’s greatest blessings upon mankind. Like marriage, it was given at creation and pre-dates the coming of the Law. “Sabbath” means “rest.” God wanted man to have rest through sweet fellowship with him. But since sin entered the world there has been no rest for mankind. People became restless wanderers like Cain, son of Adam. In the Law, God commanded his people to keep the Sabbath holy, so they may find rest. In order to keep this commandment, the Jewish religious leaders developed many rules and regulations. For example, it was illegal to travel more than three-quarters of a mile on the Sabbath. But in trying to keep all the rules and regulations, they lost the point and did not find rest on the Sabbath. Though times have changed, restlessness is still a serious problem for mankind. In this passage Jesus teaches the real meaning of the Sabbath. Most of all, he declared, **“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”** Let’s learn what Jesus did on the Sabbath and how we can have true rest.

**First, Jesus defended his disciples with the word of God (1-5).** One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples, who were always hungry, stretched out their hands naturally and began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels voraciously (1). We need to understand Jesus’ disciples. Jesus always worked hard all day long from early morning to late night, and traveled frequently. The disciples spent all of their energy just trying to keep up and often missed meals and sleep (Mk 8:31). Once in a while, they enjoyed delicious banquets in the homes of the rich, but mostly it was cereal on the go. They say that “hunger knows no shame.” The disciples ate grain vigorously, suspending their arguments with each another. Only the sounds of munching and crunching could be heard as one corner of a grainfield was being devastated by the disciples.

At this happy moment, some Pharisees popped out from nowhere. They pointed their fingers at Jesus’ disciples and said, **“Why are you doing what**

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**is unlawful on the Sabbath?”** (2) They accused the disciples of violating the Sabbath law. The law permitted people to pick heads of grain in others' fields, but the act of rubbing it in their hands was interpreted as threshing and winnowing, both of which were not allowed on the Sabbath. Here we can see how legalistic the religious leaders had become. They took one phrase in God's commandment about the Sabbath, **“On it you shall not do any work,”** and made 4 major orders, 39 categories, and 1,261 regulations which forbid specific activity on the Sabbath. They strictly applied these regulations and still do today, developing practices that govern the use of technology. For example, there is a law against **“lighting a fire on the Sabbath,”** which has been applied to the use of electricity. It is permitted to use a refrigerator on the Sabbath, but not the light inside the refrigerator. So this light must be unscrewed the day before the Sabbath in order to legally open the door on the Sabbath. They made many specific, complex rules about the Sabbath. Ordinary people didn't have time to figure out all these regulations, and just depended on the rabbi to tell them what was lawful. This created a social structure that empowered religious leaders and bound ordinary people. The religious leaders lost mercy, compassion and understanding. They did not think about God, or about needy people, but only about what could and could not be done. They became very legalistic and lost the original intention of the Sabbath. With this mindset, the Pharisees did not understand the hungry disciples. How easy it is for us to become like this. When we have no compassion, mercy or understanding we easily become judgmental and criticize others for petty reasons. In such an environment, no one can grow as Jesus' disciple.

How did Jesus respond? Did he say to his disciples, “Why are you guys always causing trouble for me? Can't you control your appetite for just a little while?” No! Never! Instead, Jesus defended his disciples. He began addressing the Pharisees, **“Have you never read...?”** It was a rebuke of their ignorance of Scripture. Their problem was not an intellectual one, but a heart problem. They studied the Scriptures diligently, but their attitude was not right. They were not humble, listening to God, learning and obedient. So they did not know the heart of God or make a relationship with him (Jn 5:39-40). Their Bible knowledge puffed them up. They became arrogant, taught according to their own ideas, and led people astray. Now, in their ignorance, they were using their Bible knowledge to attack Jesus' disciples. Their real target was Jesus, the Messiah.

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Jesus responded by teaching them God's heart through the example of David, who was a man after God's own heart. Though David was God's anointed servant, due to King Saul's jealousy his life was in danger, and he had to flee as a political criminal. David and his men were hungry and desperate. At that moment, they went to the house of God and asked the priest Ahimelek for five loaves of bread, or whatever he could find. Ahimelek replied, **"I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread."** He was referring to the **"bread of the Presence,"** which only priests could eat (Lev 24:8-9). Ahimelek was not legalistic; he wanted to help God's needy servant David with God's mercy. He knew God's heart. By eating the bread, David broke the Levitical law. But God did not condemn him. God saw David's need and had mercy on him. Even though God made the law, he is not legalistic. Knowing God's heart is not a license to break the law. It compels us to practice God's mercy on people in need.

Here we learn from Jesus how we can raise disciples. His disciples were very vulnerable at that moment. Compared to the trained religious leaders they looked like weak and useless country boys. The religious leaders' attack was vicious. They pressed Jesus to compromise with them, find fault with his disciples, and start correcting them based on the regulations. But this would have damaged Jesus' relationship with them. From the moment Jesus said, **"Follow me,"** they had simply trusted and obeyed Jesus with all their hearts. Their hearts were wide open to learn from Jesus. If Jesus had applied a legal standard to their behavior, they might well have lost their trust in Jesus and become distant. They would have been afraid to make mistakes and become self-conscious around Jesus. Jesus did not entertain criticism of his disciples even for a moment. Instead, he quickly came to their defense, risking his own reputation. To Jesus, his disciples were like David. Even though they were weak in keeping regulations, they were following Jesus with a pure motive. Jesus was full of hope for them that they would become great men of God like David. So Jesus embraced their weaknesses and made an environment in which they could grow as spiritual giants who knew God's heart. Under Jesus' embrace, they made many mistakes. But Jesus never rebuked them to follow regulations. The only time he rebuked them was to plant faith in their hearts. Even this kind of rebuke was rare. We can learn from Jesus the importance of defending young, growing believers from criticism and legalism.

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After defending his disciples, Jesus declared, **“The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”** (5). This is an amazing declaration. **“The Son of Man”** refers to the Messiah whom Daniel had prophesied about (Da 7:13-14). By calling himself **“Lord of the Sabbath,”** he reveals that he is the Son of God with divine authority to interpret and apply the Sabbath law. Through this declaration, Jesus challenged people to follow him, not human regulations. So we can see that keeping the Sabbath is not a matter of following human regulations. It is to follow Jesus and love him, obey him, serve him, and live under his rule. When we do this we can keep the Sabbath genuinely and find real rest. That is why Jesus invited us, **“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).

What makes us weary and burdened? There may be many things. One of them is sin. Sin is expressed as pride, disobedience or rebellion. When we become proud, disobedient, and rebellious, we become weary and burdened and restless. This restlessness is often revealed through a frantic use of social media, hopping from one club to another, or wandering from person to person aimlessly. These things may soothe us temporarily, yet the underlying restlessness remains and gets more acute as time passes. But when we come to Jesus and confess our sins, he forgives us, cleanses our consciences, and sets us free from all the power of sin (Heb 9:14; 1Jn 1:9). Another thing that makes us restless is a legalistic mindset. Based on human regulations we blame others and ourselves and have no rest. But when we come to Jesus and receive grace, we are freed from a legalistic mindset (Heb 4:16). The anxiety that comes from unbelief also makes us restless. When we don't trust God and try to solve everything by our own effort, we cannot but be overwhelmed by anxiety. When we come to Jesus through prayer and with thanksgiving, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds and anxiety flees away (Php 4:6-7). Many other things may make us weary and burdened including performance anxiety, injustice, or a sense of failure. But Jesus can give us rest from them all. Let's come to Jesus, who gives us true rest.

**Second, Jesus restored a man with a shriveled hand, risking his life (6-11).** On another Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and was teaching.

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Jesus always taught the word of God. What people need most on the Sabbath day, to find rest for their souls, is the word of God. The word of God makes us wise for salvation and gives us eternal life (2Ti 3:15). The word of God gives us power to resist all kinds of temptations and to live a victorious life (Lk 4:4,8,12). The word of God equips us for every good work and makes us fruitful (2Ti 3:17). As Jesus was teaching the word of God, a man with a shriveled right hand came to the worship service to hear him. Only Luke the medical doctor points out, among the gospel writers, that it was his right hand that was shriveled. Due to his condition, he could not text very well. While his friends were texting at 40 words a minute, he could manage only 10. But the most difficult struggle was not physical, but within himself. His inner mind was crippled. He was constantly frustrated by not being able to do what others were doing. Shame took root in his heart and he withdrew. He became very self-centered and had a victim's mentality. Like him, there are many whose inner lives have been marred by sin-sickness. They are thirsty for God's love and in need of healing. When the man with the shriveled hand heard about Jesus, hope came into his heart. He wanted to hear Jesus' message and receive the Messiah's touch. The Pharisees and teachers of the law should have been shepherds for this man and cared for him when he came into the synagogue. But they totally ignored his suffering and wanted to make use of him to trap and accuse Jesus. They knew that Jesus was compassionate and would want to heal the man. So they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath (7).

When Jesus saw this man, his heart went out to him and he wanted to heal him. Jesus also knew what the religious leaders were thinking (8a). If Jesus confronted them, he would be persecuted and even killed. So Jesus could have healed the man privately. But Jesus did not avoid confrontation with evil. He challenged the evil thoughts of the religious leaders by healing the man. Jesus said to him, **“Get up and stand in front of everyone.”** This was not easy for him to do. It required taking a stand on Jesus' side in a hostile, legalistic environment. But when he heard Jesus' words, he sensed the love of God in Jesus and trusted him. So he got up and stood there with faith (8b). Then Jesus said to the religious leaders, **“I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”** (9) The answer is very obvious. But the religious leaders did not answer Jesus' question. They stubbornly resisted; they were only looking for a reason to accuse him. Jesus looked around at them all, one by one, seeking any hint of

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repentance. But their hearts were hardened. According to Mark, Jesus was angry and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts (Mk 3:5).

Then Jesus said to the man, **“Stretch out your hand.”** This must have been hard for him. He had to publicly reveal his shameful shriveled hand. But Jesus’ intention was not to shame him, it was to help him overcome self-consciousness and the judgmental spirit of the religious leaders. Furthermore, it was to help him learn obedience and receive healing. Jesus’ word was a command, spoken out of his deep love and mercy for the man. The man stretched out his hand. It was an act of faith, an act of obedience and an act of prayer. His shriveled hand was completely healed and restored. Not only was his hand restored, but his agonizing life problem was solved. He could have deep rest in Jesus. Each one of us has some kind of shriveled hand. Jesus wants to heal us, restore us and give us true rest. All we have to do is stretch out our hand to Jesus.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law had just witnessed a miracle of God’s grace. They should have given glory to God and apologized to the man for not caring about him. Instead, they were furious. They began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Jesus’ life was in danger. This was the cost of healing the man with the crippled hand.

There are so many young people who are vulnerable to the damaging influence of legalism. They need protection and a safe environment to grow in. Let’s learn the mind of Jesus as shepherds for them. There are so many of us whose inner person has shriveled. Let’s stretch out our hands to Jesus so that we may be fully restored and find true rest.