

International Sunday School Lesson

Study Notes

Lesson Text: Luke 6:1-11

Lesson Title: Honoring the Sabbath

Introduction

In his book, "Studies in Luke's Gospel," author Frank Stagg writes, *"To feel the full force of what is happening at this stage of Jesus' life and ministry, one should read Luke 4:14-15 and then read Luke 6:11."* In Luke 4:14-15, Luke tells us *"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all."* This is an introductory statement of the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee, where He was initially received with acceptance and approval. The Galileans welcomed Jesus, some because they eagerly awaited the Messiah; others simply because they wanted a leader to overthrow Rome. Regardless, the Galileans welcomed Jesus to the region.

In Luke 6:11, Luke tells us, *"And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus."* It didn't take Jesus long to develop enemies. Satan doesn't allow God's servants to have much of a "honeymoon" anywhere they serve. Who are "they" and why do they have such hatred of Jesus? "They" are the Pharisees, the religious leaders, the movers and shakers of their day. "They" are the religious elite who preferred their version of being right with God as opposed to the truth Jesus taught and preached. "They" are the self-appointed judge, jury, and executioners in all things pertaining to the law. "They" expected Jesus to agree with them, to join their ranks, honor their traditions and interpretations of the law. "They" expected Jesus to do life "their way!"

When Jesus brushed aside their tradition to stand on His own authority from the Scriptures, He drew a line in the sand. The Pharisees could accept some challenge to their authority, but the one thing they couldn't accept was a defiant Messiah. Our lesson today centers around the Sabbath and focuses on two powerful challenges to the Pharisee's authority in regard to eating on the Sabbath and healing on the Sabbath. If you want to know who wins this battle, it's clear, Jesus!

A Sabbath Question about Eating (Luke 6:1-5)

Verse 1

"And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands."

The expression "on the second sabbath after the first" is difficult if not impossible to interpret. It is possible Luke is referring to the "second sabbath" after the "sabbaths" referred to in Luke 4:16, 31. The heart of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees surrounded the "sabbath." Judaism of Jesus' day, had as its anchor, Sabbath observance. From sundown Friday to sundown Saturday was the Sabbath. In the eyes of the Pharisees, what a person did or did not do during the Sabbath determined whether or not that person was right with God. These Pharisees and Scribes were trying to earn their salvation by observing the man-made laws of the Sabbath.

"Sabbath" means "to cease." The word was used to describe the seventh day command recorded in Exodus 20:8-11. The purpose of the Sabbath was simple. Man was not to work. Although God rested from His creation on the seventh day of creation in Genesis, He didn't command man to do that until the Law of Moses. Seventh day rest was one of the Ten Commandments. It was ceremonial rather than moral, and thus is not repeated in the New Testament because it wasn't part of the moral law. But the Pharisees and Scribes had become to external and so superficial that they began to look for ways that they could earn their salvation with God. By filling the Sabbath with all kinds of rules and regulations, they created a Sabbath monster that required more than anyone could do.

Illus. There were 24 chapters in the Talmud (Book of Orthodox Judaism) devoted to Sabbath Day laws. The rules and regulations were ridiculous but must be kept in order to earn your salvation. According to some of these Sabbath rules, you couldn't travel over 3,000 feet from home; lift certain things; carry certain things; build a fire or put a fire out. Women couldn't look in a mirror or put on jewelry. The laws go on and include about every imaginable aspect of life.

On this particular "sabbath," Jesus "went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands." Jesus and "his disciples" were not wealthy men. Matthew (Levi) may have been the wealthiest among them since he had no doubt extorted large sums of money as a tax collector, but for the most part these men had left everything behind to follow Jesus. Jewish law provided for people who were poor. Deuteronomy 23:24-25 permitted someone to enter a farmer's field in order to eat if he was hungry. So, in perfect

obedience to the law, Jesus and "his disciples" walked "through the corn fields...and did eat."

Jesus and "his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands." This "corn" was not like our golden kernels of corn today but probably refers to some type of barley or grain. They "rubbed" it together in their hands to get rid of the chaff and eat the grain in order to receive strength and sustenance.

Verse 2

"And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?"

It would seem that these "Pharisees" came from Jerusalem and may have been on "watch Jesus detail." There still are many "Pharisees" around today who watch other believers to see if they live right and do the things their supposed to do. When these "Pharisees" saw Jesus and His disciples plucking and eating corn, they asked, "Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?" "Ye" is plural. The Pharisees charged Jesus with violating the law as well as His disciples.

Verse 3-4

"And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?"

In answer to their question, Jesus went back to 1 Samuel 21 where David was going through a difficult period in his life. He was being chased by King Saul who was trying to kill him. When David came to the city of Nob, he and his men were hungry. David went into the house of God and asked Ahimelech the priest to give him and his men some bread to eat. The only bread available was the bread reserved for the priest. First Samuel 21:4-6 says, *"There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the Lord, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away."*

The point Jesus was making was that mercy and compassion are far more important than ceremony and ritual. When Jesus responded with these words he was indicting the entire system of Judaism. The whole Sabbath system created by these religious frauds was oppressive, merciless, and void of compassion, grace and kindness. And lest we judge these Pharisees and Scribes too quickly, we should look long and hard at our convictions and beliefs that we think make us superior to others.

Verse 5

"And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."

If Jesus' answer concerning David and the hallowed bread wasn't enough, He poured gas on the fire when He said, "That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." No one dared to challenge the Pharisees' exclusive authority as judge, jury, and executioner in regard to the Sabbath. That is, until Jesus. When Jesus said He was "Lord also of the sabbath," He is basically saying, "*You stole the Sabbath from God, I am God in the flesh, and I take it back!*" The Sabbath was not the Pharisees' to control, it belonged to Jesus.

Note: Christians worship today on Sunday, the first day of the week, not Saturday. Our rest is in Christ Jesus. Sunday is called "The Lord's Day." Yes, the "Lord's Day." That means it's not ours, it belongs to Him. You are not made righteous or spiritual by what you do or don't do on Sunday. You are made righteous by the saving work of Jesus Christ. On the Lord's Day you rest in His finished work, rejoice in His resurrection, gather together and worship with His people, and fellowship around His table and His word.

A Sabbath Question about Healing (Luke 6:6-11)

Verse 6

"And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered."

On "another sabbath," Jesus enters "the synagogue" and was teaching. "Synagogue" comes from the Greek word, "*sunago*," meaning "to gather together." Throughout the New Testament it is used to suggest a bringing together of people previously separated. It doesn't refer to a specific building or place. It could be anywhere such as a mountain side, seashore, or marketplace.

When Jesus "entered into the synagogue and taught," He was entering a den of lions. The scene has changed from a corn field to a meeting place where God's word is taught. In the corn field the Pharisees' brought the conflict and the questions to Jesus. At the "synagogue," Jesus brings the conflict and the questions to the Pharisees. He challenged their authority on what they considered to be their home turf.

Luke, the physician, tells us "there was a man whose right hand was withered" at the synagogue on this particular Sabbath. "Withered" suggests that this man's hand had not always been in this condition, but had over time dried up to uselessness. His hand was lifeless, dry, and had lost its purpose. There are many people today at the meeting place whose lives are in the same condition spiritually. They are dried up, useless, and have lost their purpose.

Verse 7

"And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him."

The "scribes and Pharisees watched" Jesus. "Watched" is the Greek word *paratereo*. "*Tereo*" means "to watch carefully. "*Para*" means "along-side of." Together the word means "they were as close to Jesus as they could possibly be but for the wrong reason." They were looking for Him so they "might find an accusation against him." They were lurking to catch Him in a "Sabbath infraction." They were waiting on Him to slip up, make a mistake, say something wrong, and do something that violated their law.

Verse 8

"But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth."

The words "he knew their thoughts" is more than just mere intuition. Jesus supernaturally understood the inner reasoning of his enemies. He knew they wanted to trap Him, yet He called for the "man which had the withered hand" to "Rise up, and stand forth in the midst." Jesus could have dealt with him in private. He could have gestured silently or healed the man without even calling attention to Himself or the man. But Jesus deliberately and boldly called the man to "stand forth in the midst."

Verse 9

"Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?"

When the man with the withered hand "arose and stood forth" (v.8), Jesus then challenged the Pharisees and Scribes with a question that left them no room for a middle of the road answer. He asked, "Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?" Jesus is a master at asking questions man can't answer. Do you think the Pharisees' were going to answer, "We believe it's best to do evil and to destroy life?" They can't answer yes or no because that would give Jesus authority to heal on the Sabbath or make them appear to be merciless people. Either they had to confirm Jesus or condemn themselves, so they just sat there. There is an answer to Jesus' question, but they can't give it. The right answer is Isaiah 1:17, *"Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."*

Verse 10

"And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other."

Please don't miss the significance when Luke tells us "And looking round about upon them all..." Jesus "looked around about" at the men, staring them down, defying their absurd rules, condemning their lack of love and compassion and daring them to interfere with what He was about to do. Jesus then spoke to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand."

Take note of Jesus' authority when He said, "Stretch forth thy hand." Take note of the man's obedience as "he did so." Take note of the results of authority and obedience. "And his hand was restored whole as the other." The Pharisees and scribes were all about authority and obedience. But it was their authority and everyone else's obedience. And when men tried to obey their authority, nothing happened but a life or law and emptiness and failure. But when Jesus authority results in man's obedience, the results are a life "restored whole."

Jesus had authority and He also had compassion. He had power to heal. These facts left His accusers without any condemning testimony. If they went to their Jewish leaders and described the events here with Jesus and the man with the withered hand, they would look like fools. And, there is no doubt now that He is, "Lord of the Sabbath."

Verse 11

"And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus."

Think about this verse very carefully. Read it again. Think about what has just happened in the synagogue. A man who has watched his hand dry up and literally die has had his hand restored to usefulness and life. Shouldn't everyone be rejoicing? Shouldn't the Pharisees' be shaking this man's hand and spreading the good news about what Jesus has done? But notice the attitude and actions of the Pharisees. "They were filled with madness." Luke is telling us they are acting out of senseless rage and uncontrollable anger. They "communed" or talked to each other about what they were going to do with Jesus. They wanted to kill Him. If anyone in the group had an idea as to how to harm Jesus or stop Jesus, they wanted to hear it.

Questions: How do you react when Jesus does something miraculous and wonder at your church? How do you respond when Jesus forgives someone you think ought to be punished instead? Are you willing to accept the fact that Jesus is in authority and can work in ways you might not approve?

Conclusion

The Pharisees and scribes were without question the enemies of Christ. They were the architects of man-made rules and regulations of their day. Jesus didn't look for a fight with them, but neither did He back down when the Pharisees took the fight to Him.

Sadly, the Pharisees are still among us today. They are called "legalists." They carry their Bible along with their private interpretation of its content. Their God is one of their own making and you are welcome to be a part of their click if you "cross your t's" and "dot your I's" the same way they do. If you don't, they will ostracize you. They will make life miserable for you. They will single you out, accuse you, mischaracterize you, label you, and try to convince you that you're wrong.

If you don't want your life ruled by Pharisees and legalists, you'll have to defy their self-appointed authority. How do you that? First, make a fresh commitment today to truth. Just as Daniel "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat" (Daniel 1:8), you must purpose in your heart to live by the truth of God's Word and not the tradition's in which you have been raised. Second, check your motives. Sometimes those of us who want to live with truth and spiritual freedom become just as stubborn and hard to live with as the

legalists. Let honesty before God and love before men be your motive. Third, ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). When people make life difficult, asking God for wisdom can make things a lot better.

Amen.