

Luke 6:1 – 11

^{6:1} 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. ² But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ ³ And Jesus answering them said, ‘Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, ⁴ 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?’ ⁵ And he was saying to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’ ⁶ On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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?’ ¹⁰ After looking around at them all, he said to him, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ And he did so; and his hand was restored. ¹¹ But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *The Pharisees* were a right-wing political and religious group in Israel focusing on Jewish nationalism and religious piety. They believed that Jerusalem and the Temple had become corrupt because the Jewish leadership in the capital collaborated with Rome. Many also supported militant, revolutionary groups of Jews who were trying to retake the capital and oust the Romans. They Pharisees focused on trying to stay religiously pure by following the Jewish Mosaic Law.
- *Jesus was retelling David’s story.* The following points of the two stories line up:

Who is the true King?	David	Jesus
Who are the hostile pursuers?	King Saul and his henchmen, the false leaders who will soon be dethroned by David	Pharisees and Herodians, the false leaders who will soon be eclipsed by Jesus’ lordship
What is the pursued king doing?	He is in exile; avoids the capital, stays in the wilderness, builds up a loyal group of followers	He is in exile; avoids the capital, stays in the wilderness, builds up a loyal group of followers
What is the ‘improper’ thing to do?	David and his men eat bread that is ‘holy’	Jesus and his disciples eat on a day that is ‘holy’
Why was this OK?	Because David was the true King and loved to be in the presence of God	Because Jesus is the true King and brought the presence of God

Possible Introduction Questions (Choose one)

1. Talk about the movie Jerry Maguire. Recall the line, “You complete me” said by Tom Cruise to Renee Zellweger. How true is it that a boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse completes us? How is it untrue?

Questions

1. What do these two incidents have in common? Why do you think Luke puts them together?
2. Let’s explore the Jesus and David connection
 - a. Who was chasing David and his followers when they were hungry? King Saul. See 1 Sam.21.
 - b. Who is chasing Jesus and his disciples when they were hungry? Pharisees.
 - c. What was David’s role going to be, as promised by God? The new and true King of Israel.
 - d. What was Jesus’ role going to be, as promised by God? The new and true King of Israel.
 - e. So what does that make the Saul and his henchmen? False pretenders persecuting the true King
 - f. So what does that make the Pharisees? False pretenders persecuting the true King
 - g. Note: David became king in Israel by building a loyal base of followers around him. Jesus is becoming king the same way: By building a loyal base of followers. This is why Jesus and his disciples will be “fishers of men.”
 - h. A helpful parallel to draw might be this: The Declaration of Independence presumably declares the intention of the United States to uphold the dignity of all men and women, of all races and classes. But for a significant part of U.S. history, it pertained only to white landowning men. It didn’t come from the past to impact the present. Instead, it became a memorial. White Americans just felt good that they had it though they didn’t actually employ it. Some would argue that that’s true even today. If you went to the White House right now, walked up to the President in the Executive Office, put a copy of the Declaration of Independence on his desk, and enacted some inauguration ceremony actions – you raised your right hand, placed your left hand on a Bible, and said, ‘See you on January 20th!’ – you would be telling him that you’re on your way in, and he’s on his way out. You would be sending a message symbolically that says that you are the next President, with a mandate given by the Declaration. That’s the kind of message Jesus is saying. ‘I am the heir to the throne of David; I am the real king here. I am the one who is going to make the Sabbath not as a memorial of an old event a long time ago, but a reality. I will complete people in a new way.’
 - i. To top it off, Jesus says of himself, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’ Jesus means at least two things here. One is his claim to speak for God and alter proper Sabbath observance. In effect, Jesus is saying, ‘Whether or not it is proper to pick grain according to your laws, I don’t care. I don’t operate within your system. I stand above it because I am Lord over it.’ The second is his claim to fulfill the Sabbath, meaning, ‘The Sabbath symbolizes me; I make people complete, not you or your system.’ Here is the outrageous way Jesus turns the tables and raises the stakes. The Pharisees thought they could start a nitpicky battle about what is the right way to observe the Sabbath, or what is the right way to keep people invested in the Mosaic system, etc. What they get instead is a rebuke: ‘We’re not even talking about the same thing. I don’t fit in your little system, so don’t try to have me take a side in your petty concerns. I am Lord over it and I will call you out of your system, too, because you are on your way out of power.’
3. Let’s explore the connection between Jesus and the Sabbath

Gen.2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

- a. What was the Sabbath all about?
 - i. What did God do or not do on the first Sabbath day in Genesis 2:1-3? What made this day different from the other days?
 - ii. If you could boil down the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3 to themes, what would they be? Completion and rest.
 - iii. Why did God rest? Because He needed it? No, because He wanted to emphasize that His first work – the first creation – was complete.

- iv. Note: The Sabbath does not mean ‘rest’ per se. It means ‘completion,’ and completion is observed or honored by resting. On a weekly cycle, the Sabbath means that the week is complete; therefore the Israelites rested.
 - v. Note: After the Sabbath came the Fall, where humanity and the creation were tossed into craziness. So God began the work of a new creation, a second creation, which was inaugurated by Jesus Christ (2 Cor.5:17). The older, first Sabbath then became a symbol of God’s commitment to bring this new creation to completion, too. Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath reflects his commitment to restoring sinful people, i.e. healing the spiritually sick.
- b. Why did the Pharisees think the Sabbath was a bad day to heal this man? How did the Pharisees interpret the Sabbath?
- i. Parallel: Kind of how the Declaration of Independence was supposed to be about respecting the dignity of all men and women, not just white landowning men. But for most of U.S. history, it did not impact the present. It became a memorial. People were proud to have it in the past.
 - ii. “We don’t do work because this is how God’s chosen people honor this day.” Collective, ethnic identity boundary. Traditional community standards honoring the past.
 - iii. “This is what you must do to please God.” Individual legalism based around honoring the past.
 - iv. The Pharisees wanted to commemorate the past, rather than honor what God was doing in the present through Jesus. By doing this, they wanted to keep people in an incomplete state of being.
 - v. Are there ways in which you find it easier to remember what God has done in your past rather than actually live by God’s power now?
- c. So why did Jesus think the Sabbath was a good day to heal this man? Because the completion of the week is a good day to make this man complete. Jesus wanted to ‘complete’ him on the day that symbolized completion. Jesus is taking an old wineskin (Israel’s weekly observance of the Sabbath) commemorating the old creation and making a new wineskin denoting the new creation.
- d. What was it like for this man to approach Jesus?
- i. How was this man NOT experiencing being complete or being at rest?
 - ii. How might it have felt for this man to stand up and walk over to Jesus? Stretch out his hand? Might this have been emotionally hard to do?
 - iii. In what ways do you feel like you’ve tried to compensate for handicaps in your life? Either things that have happened to you, or ways you feel underdeveloped, etc.?
 - iv. How might it feel for you to “get up and come forward” to Jesus in regards to that area of your life?
 - v. Jesus forces the Pharisees to play by his rules ‘on another Sabbath’ when he heals a man with a crippled hand in a synagogue. The man could be described as physically incomplete; what better day for Jesus to demonstrate the principle of completeness than the Sabbath? His simple query, ‘Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or do harm, to save life or destroy it?’ is a bombshell dropped on the Pharisees’ playground of how to evaluate proper Sabbath behavior. They do not use Jesus’ criteria. Just as Jesus has no way to fit into the Pharisees’ categories for proper Sabbath behavior, so they have no way to fit into his. Jesus simply explodes their categories. Though they ‘were watching him closely...to accuse him,’ they can say nothing and fall silent.
 - vi. The Pharisees and scribes are then ‘filled with rage.’ The Pharisees’ plot, while not specified, is already likely to be one of murder. Luke hints strongly at this because the phrase ‘filled with rage’ was used to describe the Nazareth synagogue attendees after Jesus’ disconcerting sermon in Lk.4:16 – 27. In that incident, the synagogue members ‘rose up and cast him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill...in order to throw him down the cliff’ (4:29 – 30). Jesus escaped that mob scene, possibly by exercising divine power but more probably by staring them down, by the mere force of his personality. This time, the Pharisees and scribes form the core of the new faction that plots against Jesus. Since they too are ‘filled with rage,’ we expect that they will also make an attempt on Jesus’ life. This is no longer an isolated incident in Nazareth; the full-scale rejection of Jesus by Israel’s leadership is now underway.
- e. How is Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath? He is the one who brings humanity to rest, completion, abundance by joining others to himself, and in himself is the union of God and humanity. He defines

the Sabbath as the time to have compassion, to bring people to wholeness, completion, and rest. That was the purpose of God's institution of the Sabbath and the creation to begin with.

- f. How have we seen Jesus complete others? Restoring the unclean leper to cleanliness and to the community. Healing the paralytic. Most importantly, forgiving sin. It is the forgiveness of sin that really restores people to community and heals.
- g. Application: Have you experienced Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath? In what ways would you like Jesus to 'complete' your humanity with the union of God and humanity that he has perfected in himself?
- h. Application: Are there ways in which it is difficult for us to receive him as Lord in this way? Pray about that.