

Lord of the Sabbath

Luke 6:1-11 – Leader's version

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

30 minutes

1. Do you know what the purpose of the Sabbath was in the Old Testament? See Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8 and Exodus 31:12-17.

God made this day (our Saturday) holy – God rested from his work of creation and this reminds us to take rest from our work. The Sabbath was so important that it was one of the 10 commandments and the punishment for breaking it was death. The Sabbath was a day to celebrate and remember the covenant of the Law, made between God and Israel at Mount Sinai (NIVSB Ex 20:10 footnotes).

Although God had said that man should rest on the Sabbath, he hadn't said that man couldn't eat, be merciful, travel etc. Over time, people had added to God's command making it very restrictive about what you could do (very little) and could not do (most things, including sewing more than one stitch, tying or loosing knots, walking more than 1999 paces – basically anything except what was absolutely necessary to preserve life (Edwards 2015, p177)).

2. Read Luke 6:1-2. What are the Pharisees challenging Jesus about now? Are they right?

We are seeing the Pharisees challenging Jesus a lot in this part of Luke's gospel! This time it's about picking corn on the Sabbath (maybe not about travelling on the Sabbath, as it seems the Pharisees are walking too). Read Exodus 34:21 to your group and ask what God says about harvesting on the Sabbath = do not harvest on the Sabbath. Then read Deuteronomy 23:25 and ask what God says about picking corn in someone else's field = picking ears of corn in someone's field was not stealing, but using a sickle was (careful this doesn't get misinterpreted with respect to scrumping, which most people would see as stealing). They may have seen Jesus and the disciples' actions as gleaning and therefore harvesting, as Leviticus 23:22. Let the group discuss whether the Pharisees were right, don't try to come to a conclusion yet.

3. Read Luke 6:3-4. What does Jesus reply and what does he mean?

(The account of King David can be found in 1 Samuel 21:1-6).

In 1 Sam 21, the ceremonial bread was probably the bread from the day before that had been removed from the altar (the priests would eat it) and replaced with fresh bread. In recounting this, Jesus is pointing out that the law was ceremonial, not legalistic – God puts people before rules.

4. Read Luke 6:5. What does Jesus mean?

'Son of Man' is the term that Jesus used most often when speaking of himself. It is taken from Daniel 7 and referred to the Messiah. (Daniel refers to 'one like a Son of Man' who came from heaven and was given authority, glory and power by God (the Father). This man was worshipped by all peoples and had an everlasting, indestructible kingdom).

Jesus says that, 1. He is the Messiah, the one spoken of by Daniel, and 2. He is Lord of (has authority over) the Sabbath. No man has authority over the Sabbath, it was a creation order set by God, so there is an implicit claim to divinity here.

Since Jesus has authority over the Sabbath, and in fact decreed it, he knows its true purpose and it's nothing to do with stopping people from filling empty tummies.

5. Read Luke 6:6-7. What happens on another Sabbath, and why?

Jesus is teaching and there is a man with a shrivelled (paralysed?) hand. The Pharisees are watching Jesus to see what he does, because they are looking for something concrete to accuse him with. This has gone past a religious debate, it's become a trap waiting to be set.

6. Read Luke 6:8-10. How does Jesus understand the Sabbath laws?

Jesus understands the Sabbath as it was meant to be – a rest from work, reminding us of God's rest from creation. The Sabbath points forward to heaven – if man had not sinned, life would have been just Sabbath, no work to be done (i.e. no works to try to atone for sin or hard labour. Work itself was decreed pre-fall, but it was easy and fruitful until the curse).

Jesus understands that man has added to God's Sabbath laws and has become so strict and blind to God's intentions that they would allow someone to suffer rather than help them on the Sabbath. He's challenging them as to the real meaning of the Sabbath and they can't answer, because they will contradict themselves if they do.

7. How do the Pharisees and the teachers of the law react to Jesus' answer and his miracle, and what do they do?

They are furious about the miracle! They are blind to what is right before them, God's Son demonstrating God's power and authority over sickness and over the Sabbath.

They begin to plot against Jesus – on the Sabbath!! In answer to Jesus' question in v9, they are doing evil and plotting to destroy life on the Sabbath.

8. Read Hebrews 4 v 7-10. As followers of Jesus we do not celebrate the Sabbath (Saturday), we celebrate the Lord's Day (Sunday); the day of the week that Jesus was resurrected. How does Hebrews 4 help us to understand the Sabbath-rest as a follower of Jesus?

Remember, the Sabbath was originally kept to remind the people that God rested after 6 days of creation. Entering the Promised Land, under the leadership of Joshua, after a very long journey did not give the Israelites true 'rest'. It did not bring them into relationship with God. Heb 4 v 7 quotes David in Ps95 speaking of a day called 'today'. The day to respond to God's offer of salvation is always today. There's an urgency to our need to respond. Responding to Jesus in repentance and belief gives us the true Sabbath-rest; the rest from our work of trying to save ourselves. This Sabbath-rest in Christ also reflects God's resting from His work of creation, and we remember it on a Sunday.

This means that the OT rules about what you can and can't do on the Sabbath do not apply to us as Christians. In view of this, we each need to work out how we approach a Sunday – do we work for money, do we shop, do we work in the house etc – not blindly following a set of rules that no longer apply.

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If someone asked you what you have learnt about Jesus from Luke 6 v 1-11 what would you say?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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4. Read Luke 6:5. What does Jesus mean?
5. Read Luke 6:6-7. What happens on another Sabbath, and why?
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