

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 8: Lord of the Sabbath; Choosing the Twelve -- Luke 6:1-19

It is the Sabbath, and Jesus and His disciples are walking through a field of standing grain. The men are hungry, so they do what the Law of Moses allowed any traveler to do: they reach out, pluck some heads of grain, rub them between their hands to loosen the chaff, and eat. It is a small, ordinary thing, the kind of thing you would never notice. But someone is watching. The Pharisees have been following Jesus closely now, and where we see hungry men taking a handful of grain, they see lawbreakers. "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" they demand (v. 2). The question that follows from Jesus will reach all the way up to the throne of God.

Jesus does not argue the fine points of their Sabbath rules. He goes somewhere they did not expect, back to a story they revered. He reminds them of David, fleeing for his life, who went into the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which only the priests were permitted to eat, and gave it to his men as well (vv. 3-4). Then He says something that should have stopped them cold: "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath" (v. 5). The Sabbath was God's own gift to Israel, written by His finger in stone. And here is a carpenter from Nazareth calling Himself its Lord. Either this is the height of blasphemy, or this is God in the flesh standing in a grainfield.

On another Sabbath the conflict sharpens. A man with a withered hand is in the synagogue, and the scribes and Pharisees are watching to see whether Jesus will heal him, hoping for an accusation. Jesus does not hide. He calls the man forward where everyone can see, and He asks the question that exposes their hearts: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" (v. 9). He heals the man with a word, and the hand is restored whole. And the men who had been so careful about a handful of grain are now "filled with fury" and begin discussing what they might do to Jesus (v. 11). Their rules could swallow a healing but not bear a mercy.

Then the scene shifts entirely. Jesus goes out to a mountain and spends the whole night in prayer to God (v. 12). When morning comes, He calls His disciples and chooses twelve of them, naming each one, whom He also names apostles (vv. 13-16). These are the men who will carry His gospel to the world and become the foundation of His church. After the long night of prayer comes the great crowd, people from all over, pressing in to hear Him and to be healed, because power was coming out from Him and healing them all (vv. 17-19). Read these verses slowly, and watch how Jesus moves from a Lord who claims authority over the Law, to a Lord whose mercy cannot be made unlawful, to a Lord who builds His church on chosen men soaked in prayer.

Group Discussion: When the Pharisees confront Jesus about plucking grain, He does not negotiate the details of their Sabbath rules; He simply declares, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath" (v. 5). What does it do to you to hear Jesus claim authority over a command that God

Himself gave to Israel? As a group, talk about what it means to live under the lordship of a Christ who has authority not only over our behavior but over the very Law itself.

Personal Reflection: The Pharisees were so committed to their rules that they were “filled with fury” when a suffering man was healed in front of them (vv. 10–11). It is possible to be religiously busy and still have a hardened heart toward the people God loves. Where might your own carefulness about being right be quietly crowding out compassion for someone who is hurting?

Read Luke 6:1–19

Study Questions

1. When the Pharisees challenge the disciples for plucking grain, Jesus points back to David, who ate the bread of the Presence “which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat” (vv. 3–4), and then declares, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath” (v. 5). What is Jesus claiming about Himself, and how does this claim place Him above the Law of Moses rather than merely inside it?
2. The Pharisees were watching the disciples so closely that they noticed a handful of grain being plucked and rubbed on the Sabbath (vv. 1–2). When it comes to other people, are you quicker to notice their failures or their needs, and what would it look like this week to watch people the way Jesus does rather than the way the Pharisees did?
3. In the synagogue Jesus deliberately calls the man with the withered hand to “come and stand here,” then asks, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” (vv. 8–9). What does this question reveal about the true purpose of God’s law and about the heart of God toward human suffering?
4. Jesus “knew their thoughts” and yet healed the man openly, refusing to let the threat of accusation silence His mercy (vv. 8–10). Where has the fear of what others might think kept you from doing the good you knew you should do, and what would it take to obey Christ openly the way He acted openly?
5. After the healing, the scribes and Pharisees “were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus” (v. 11). How can devotion to religious rules become so distorted that it opposes the very God it claims to serve, and what does this warn us about in our own approach to worship and obedience?
6. Before choosing the apostles, Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God” (v. 12). When you face a weighty decision, where does prayer actually fall in your process, and what would it look like to seek God first and at length the way Jesus did, rather than treating prayer as a quick afterthought?
7. Jesus prayed all night and then “called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles” (v. 13), and Luke carefully lists each name (vv. 14–16). What does the deliberate, prayerful choosing of twelve men as apostles teach us about the foundation of the church and the way Christ provides leadership for His people?

8. The list of the Twelve includes “Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor” (v. 16), a man chosen, trusted, and sent out who later fell away. What does the presence of Judas among the apostles stir in you about the seriousness of remaining faithful, and where do you sense your own need to guard your heart against drifting from Christ?
9. Jesus calls Himself “lord of the Sabbath” (v. 5), claiming divine authority over a command that was central to God’s covenant with Israel. Since Christ is Lord of the Sabbath and has fulfilled the Old Law, what does the New Testament teach about whether Christians are bound to keep the Sabbath, and how does this shape the way we gather to worship and break bread on the first day of the week?
10. Look back across the whole passage: Jesus claiming lordship over the Law, refusing to let mercy be made unlawful, praying all night before choosing His apostles, and pouring out healing power on the pressing crowd (vv. 17–19). Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 6:1–19 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 2:14–17, the record of debt nailed to the cross and the Sabbath as a shadow whose substance belongs to Christ; Hebrews 8:6–13, the new and better covenant that makes the first one obsolete; Acts 20:7, the disciples gathering on the first day of the week to break bread; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, the apostolic instruction to set aside giving on the first day of every week; Ephesians 2:19–20, the church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone.