



“The Lord Our Sabbath”
 Luke 6:1-5

Idea: Jesus is the rest the Sabbath foreshadowed.

Intro: Two sisters hosted a popular, traveling preacher in their home. His presence was a big deal in their town, so they invited their family, friends, and neighbors over to meet him and enjoy a dinner in his honor. One sister was detailed oriented. She wanted everything to be perfect for her special guest. All day long she readied her home and prepared food. Even after her guests had arrived and were getting to know the preacher, she was busy in the kitchen consumed with making sure everything was flawless. The other sister stayed out with the other guests and the preacher. She was captivated by him and his words. Rather than busying herself with the preparations like the other sister, she sat at the preacher’s feet and was focused on getting to know him.

The first sister grew aggravated toward her sister and her unwillingness to help with the preparations. She even went so far as to ask the preacher if he would tell the sister to go and help. His response surprised her. Rather than rebuking the sister who was not helping, he praised her. She had chosen the better thing. The busy sister had chosen the lesser. In fact, he pointed out how the busy sister was anxious and troubled about many things. Her activity had not brought peace into her life. Instead, it only added to her troubles. On the other hand, the other sister having chosen to pursue relationship over activity did not possess the same anxieties and troubles.

We find this story in Luke’s gospel (Luke 10:38-42). The two sisters are Mary and Martha. We will examine it in the coming months. I share it now because it depicts the difference between religion and relationship. Which is your preference? Do you prefer religion or relationship? This question may seem easy to answer for those of us who have been around the Bible and the church for some time. We say, “Well of course my preference is relationship because that is what Jesus desires of us. It is what the Bible teaches.” While that may be true, if we are honest with ourselves, the reality is that we too often prefer religion over relationship. In our pride and self-righteousness, we like the idea of working and making a way for ourselves. Like Martha, we want Jesus to be proud of what we do for Him, and we believe that our “doing” will bring rest and freedom to our lives. We believe the forms of our worship bring us closer to God.

Luke has been revealing this same struggle among the Pharisees and scribes. They struggled to understand Jesus. They could not fit His teaching within their religious paradigm. They questioned Jesus and His disciples often, wondering how they could follow God when they did not do all the religious things they and others perceived to be of utmost importance. At the end of Luke 5, we saw that they had questions about Jesus eating with sinners and not fasting. In chapter six, we find Jesus establishing three new spiritual realities to replace that which was worn out in the Jewish religion. He will speak of a new Sabbath, a new nation, and a new blessing in the new spiritual kingdom. Today and next Sunday, we will examine the new Sabbath.

Luke 6:1-5.

Inquiry: From these verses I want us to look at the Lord our Sabbath. We are going to see that Jesus is the rest the Sabbath foreshadowed.

The sanctity of the seventh day was a distinctive part of the Jewish faith. God gave Israel the Sabbath law at Sinai through Moses (Ex 20:8-11). The fourth commandment says, “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*” (Ex 20:8). The Sabbath was a sign symbolizing the relationship between God and the people of Israel (Ex 31:12-19). The word means “rest,” and it is linked with God’s cessation from work after the six days of creation. He created the universe and life on earth in six days (Gen 1). Then on the seventh day God rested. When God established His covenant with Israel, He commanded them to rest on the seventh day just as He did. If they did not rest on the Sabbath, the punishment was death. The severity of this law led the teachers of Israel to develop over time a series of thirty-nine clarifications of work. These exotic, legalistic categories became capable of endless subdivisions.

Three of the thirty-nine categories laid out in the *Mishnah* are “reaping, threshing, and winnowing” (M. Shabbath, 7.2). The Pharisees accused Jesus and His disciples of violating these three categories. They reaped when they plucked the heads of grain, and they threshed and winnowed by rubbing the grain in their hands. By their strict and oppressive rules, the religious leaders had turned the Sabbath into a burden instead of the blessing God had intended it to be. Jesus, therefore, challenged both their doctrine and their authority. His debate with them reveals the Lord to be our Sabbath. We discover that Jesus is the rest for His people foreshadowed in the Sabbath. As we work through this passage, there are three divine principles for us to understand.

Three divine principles:

1. Meeting human needs is more important to the Lord than protecting religious rules.

The Pharisees declared that what Jesus and His disciples had done was not lawful (vs. 2). How did they know that the group of men had walked through a grain field and picked some of the grain to eat? They were obviously spying on Jesus to discredit His life and ministry. On this particular day, they were hungry as they walked through the grainfields. The Mosaic Law allowed for Jews to eat from a neighbor’s vineyard, orchard, or field as long as they gleaned rather than harvested the produce (Deut 23:24-25). Therefore, the actions of Jesus and His disciples were within the parameters of that part of the Law. The problem arose from the fact that they did so on the Sabbath. This was the point the Pharisees raised with Jesus.

The Lord responded by asking two questions. First, He asked if they had read the account of David and His men eating the bread of the Presence (1 Sam 21:1-6). This bread consisted of twelve loaves of unleavened bread that were arranged in two rows of six on a gold table in the Tabernacle/Temple (Lev 24:5-6). Each Sabbath the loaves were removed and replaced with fresh bread. The loaves symbolized God’s presence and that He was the source of Israel’s strength and nourishment. It reminded them of their dependence upon God for everything both physically and spiritually. The bread was ceremonially holy and could only be eaten by Aaronic priests at the conclusion of its seven-day display (Lev 24:9).

In 1 Samuel 21, David was a desperate, famished refugee fleeing from the wrath of King Saul. His men were starving, and he begged Ahimelech the priest in Nob for bread. The priest indicated that he had none except for the bread of the Presence that had been removed from the Tabernacle. He was willingly to give it to David if he and his men were ceremonially clean. They were clean, so David took the bread for he and his men.

Jesus’ point in referring to this story was to indicate that the Lord is more concerned with mercy than sacrifice. In other words, God is more concerned with meeting human needs than He is about protecting

religious rules.

The second question Jesus asked is found in Matthew's gospel (Matt 12:5). Jesus pointed out the glaring fact that the priests worked each Sabbath when they served in the Temple, sacrificing animals and making offerings on behalf of the people. What they did in the Temple was work, and God did not condemn them. Quite the opposite...God ordained their work on the Sabbath. In contradiction to His own commandment, He instituted their service because meeting human needs is more important than religious rules.

In order to poke holes in the Pharisees' question about authority, Jesus stated in Matt 12:6, *"I tell you, something greater than the temple is here."* This brings us to a second divine principle.

2. The Lord rules over the Sabbath.

The Pharisees failed to recognize Jesus as God the Son. To them, He was nothing more than a rival religious teacher who threatened their authority among the people. They did not recognize Him as the Giver of the Law and therefore greater than the Law. Jesus, however, made the point for them in 6:5. *"The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."* As Lord of the Sabbath, He rules the Sabbath. He created it, ordained it, and owns it. He, therefore, does not serve it, nor is He guilty before it.

In this debate over the Sabbath, we cannot help but wonder about the purpose of the Sabbath. Did God give mankind the Sabbath day so that we would simply remember His activity and rest and then mimic His actions or is there something more? Mark clues us into something more in his gospel. There Jesus says, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"* (Mark 2:27). The Pharisees served the law, but according to Jesus the law was meant to serve them. In the case of the Sabbath, the law was intended to protect God's people from overwork and the idolatry of work. It was to protect them from the routine that regularly forgets God by reminding them for an entire day that the Lord is their God and they are His people. The Sabbath was given to refresh the souls and bodies of people by having them meet with the Lord. It was the kindness and graciousness of God that led Him to dedicate an entire day of the week so that His people might know Him, meet with Him, enjoy Him, and be refreshed by Him.

It is clear from Jesus' words that He and His men were not breaking the Sabbath when they plucked the grain and rubbed it in their hands. How can this be though? Is God contradicting His own Word? There is no doubt that Israel was not to gather manna on the Sabbath when they were wandering in the wilderness. There was none on the Sabbath. Those who went out to gather were chastised (Ex 16:27-28). Jesus was not contradicting the Word of God. Instead, He was fulfilling it. Jesus rules over the Sabbath, but He is even more than that, which brings us to a third divine principle.

3. The Lord is the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a shrine in time. It was a holy period whereby time was dedicated for rest and refreshment with the Lord. God gifted the Sabbath to Israel so they would have a regular day for meeting with Him and have their souls refreshed. In much the same way, the Lord's Day (Sunday) is a gift to the church.

The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Likewise, the Law was made for man and not man for the Law. It is our tutor to train us in righteousness. It was not given to make us righteous but to show our need for righteousness and to point toward the Righteous One. The writer of Hebrews makes this connection for us. According to Hebrews 4, the real Sabbath rest is, first, ceasing from working to earn righteousness with God, and second, by faith in Christ entering the rest Jesus gives. The Sabbath is found in Christ who gives rest for eternity and not just for a day. It is a rest from the war with sin that has been purchased by the blood of Jesus. It is a true and lasting rest.

The rest provided and foreshadowed in the Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is rest for those who have faith in Him as Lord and Savior. The Sabbath day has been set aside by the Lord. For this reason, Jesus and His disciples were not breaking the Law when they plucked and ate grain from the field. Today, as Christians we do not observe the Sabbath because Jesus is our Sabbath rest. The Pharisees failed to recognize this new reality.

Conclusion: The first time Jesus was in the home of Mary and Martha the busy sister also failed to recognize this reality. As Mary and the guests sat around and enjoyed Jesus' company, Martha was on the move working to make everything perfect. This first portrayal of Martha rightly pictures the religious person who is working to be right with God. The second time Jesus visits their home Martha's heart had undergone a transformation. She had learned that relationship is better than religion. In John 11, after her brother Lazarus had died and Jesus came to visit, Martha was the first to go to Jesus. She had discovered that Jesus was her rest. Even in her grief, she rested in the Lord.

Are you resting in the Lord? Have you found that being in relationship with Him is far greater than religious activity? God has never expected, nor has He ever demanded that we please Him through ritual and religion. From the days of Eden, God has always desired to be in relationship with His image bearers. He wants you and I to find rest in Him.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?

Jesus knows everything about you. He has assessed your life and knows your sin. In the face of your sin, He has also issued a call. Will you today decide to follow Him?