

8/03/26

with Morgan

Grain Picking vs Nit Picking

Luke 6: 1 - 11

There are two occasions in chapter 5 when Jesus' actions anger the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus claimed to be able forgive sins, and he ate and drank with sinners! Then Jesus gets himself into more conflict on two separate Sabbath days. The question is, 'How to keep the Sabbath?'; by meeting human need (grain picking) or by rigorous legalistic law

keeping (nitpicking). Let's look at this under two headings: the accusation and the defence.

The First Accusation. Jesus and the twelve were on a walk through some cornfields one Sabbath Day when they picked and ate some of the crop! Deuteronomy 23:25 says that if you enter your neighbour's cornfield, you may pick the ears with your hands, but do not put a sickle to their standing corn. The Law was designed to feed the hungry. And given that Jesus' disciples were just picking a few grains for a snack to satisfy their hunger they were in keeping with the law. It was like going for a walk on a Sunday afternoon and picking wild blackberries to eat. What angered the Pharisees was that it was the Sabbath. The Sabbath was instituted in creation and then included in the ten commandments. Exodus 20:8, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy". It was part of the moral law, so you had to obey it, otherwise you were sinning. Jesus' disciples were picking grain which the Pharisees saw as reaping, rubbing it between their hands which is threshing and discarding the husks, so winnowing. And finally, they ate food they had prepared. It was four distinct breaches of the sabbath in one mouthful. Jesus, as their master, was responsible. so the Pharisees bring their accusation, 'Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'

The defence. Jesus does not cite Moses (Deut.23:25) but he points to another Old Testament passage and answers them with a question 'Have you not read...?' That is funny! He's asking these religious experts in the Old Testament whether they'd read it. On this occasion he points them to David in 1 Samuel 21 :1-6. David and his men were on a mission and they were hungry, so they asked the priest if he had anything for them to eat. The only food he had was bread which was only lawful for the priests to eat. The priest recognised their need and gave them permission to eat the show bread. David wasn't a priest and he wasn't even king yet, but he ate bread that was unlawful for him to eat. David saw and recognised that meeting human need was more important than the strict letter of the law. In fact, meeting human need was perfectly in keeping with the law! And it's interesting that there was silence from the Pharisees. To answer would either mean condemning David or admitting that Jesus was right, neither of which they were willing to do! Jesus had exposed their hypocrisy. What Jesus shows them is that the Old Testament Scriptures did not teach the overly strict legalism they had developed and forced on others. Following the silence, Jesus says something amazing, "The Son of Man is the lord of the Sabbath. (5) This is a staggering claim, and it would have shocked the Pharisees because Jesus uses the title, 'The Son of Man' This phrase is found in the book of Daniel where the son of man is seen as a divine messianic figure. Jesus is claiming to be this very one and the 'Lord of the Sabbath.' In doing so Jesus is claiming to be the Lord of divine law. Jesus is saying, 'It's up to me to decide what is lawful and unlawful on the Sabbath.' The Sabbath is holy. It was given as a gift in creation, and fulfilled in Christ, and it remains a gift to God's people with the purpose of rest and worship. We still benefit from that principle today. We gather on the Sabbath to worship him and encourage one another. If you don't show up, you're missed! Take a break from work if your job allows it. If not, that's fine, sometimes we do have jobs where we must work on Sunday! So, pick another day to spend in God's word and have fellowship with someone! Have a Sabbath once a week and keep it! But if keeping the sabbath means we are walking around, like the Pharisees, with a list of do and don'ts, and paranoid that our next movement, action, or thought might be a breach of the law, or worse than that, judging what others do or don't do, we haven't understood what it's about! This is grace vs legalism. Or Grain picking vs nit picking. God's law (particularly the Sabbath) was never designed to crush or burden people, it was to care for them like Jesus did! Meeting human need is grace! Grace being undeserved kindness from God. In the case of Luke 6, hunger, or drink, shelter, clothing is never a violation of the sabbath or the rest of the law, it upholds it. We are not justified by keeping the law but by faith alone, through grace alone, because of Christ alone! The one who not only fulfils the Sabbath but is Lord over it!

The accusation. Luke records the events of another Sabbath Day in the synagogue. While Jesus was teaching there was a man there who had a shrivelled right hand and yet again the

Pharisees are there just like in the grainfields, watching Jesus to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. Here is a man in need of mercy, maybe in pain and discomfort but all they can do is watch and see if Jesus will show him the mercy he so desperately needs, and when he does, they will pounce. It shows yet again that they misunderstood the law they so proudly upheld. For them the law was merely a set of rules to follow. Their nitpicking and pettiness showed to all around them that they were very holy and respectable people. But inwardly they were evil. Jesus saves some of his harshest words for these people! In Matthew 23: 25-26, he says, "Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will be clean also. The next verses, 27-28, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." Have you ever eaten an apple, that is shiny and crunchy on the outside but is actually rotten on the inside? That's what Jesus says the Pharisees are like. and it's what we see in Luke 6. They upheld the law outwardly, but it had not changed their hearts. They were so far from knowing God in their hearts, that they were blind to human need! And here is a warning for us not to fall into the same trap. We might be acting like a Christian, we might be saying the right things, and doing the right things, we might have convinced others that we are holy! We might even be forcing our own standards on to others! We might even be forcing high standards onto others while not keeping them ourselves! Inside we are full of sin and evil, and if we're honest that is true of each one of us whether we are trying to hide it or not. The Christian faith is not about outward appearances, it's about an inward transformation brought about by faith, through saving grace! Grace, remember, is God's undeserved kindness poured out into our lives! That's the only thing that saves us, the only thing we have which we can boast in! Does that mean obedience that has no value? No, course not! Obedience is very important, but if it's rigorous legalistic obedience at the expense of faith in Jesus and dependence on the grace of God, we are just like the Pharisee in Luke 6 and Matthew 23; lost and far from God. So that's the accusation. It's an accusation from silence about what they're hoping Jesus will do so they can catch him out!

The defence. Jesus' defence is to do the thing they were expecting him to do. He heals the man. It's interesting because Jesus takes the initiative and asks which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or destroy it? For Jesus, not healing his man or postponing it was not an option. His point is that that if you can do good for a fellow human on the Sabbath, and you choose not to, you've done what is evil! Doing good and showing mercy always fulfils the law even if it involves something that might be seen as work on the Sabbath. Ignoring real human need by not showing grace to someone in the name of legalism misses God's heart for sinners.

If the question was the sermon, here is the illustration and application! Jesus says to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he does, exposing his shame in front of everyone, and as he does, his hand is fully restored, his shame is taken away by the kindness and love of Jesus! He exposes the evil of the Pharisees' hearts and their misunderstanding of the law! But far from opening their eyes and soften their hearts Jesus actions infuriate them. The tension in Luke's gospel between Jesus and the religious leaders is bubbling over! Look at verse 11. "But the Pharisees and teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do with Jesus." Having witnessed this, they knew there was nothing they could do against him! The people were on his side, and I think deep down they knew he was right, but such was the hardness of their hearts they were unwilling to admit that and repent. So, they plot, to get rid of Jesus once and for all.

Conclusion. In both Sabbath stories, the issue is the heart. The Pharisees were nitpickers, obsessed with outward appearances, blind to human need. Jesus, the Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath, shows us the true purpose of God's law; to show mercy and compassion to others, flowing from the grace we ourselves know and is revealed fully at the cross of Christ. We are called to be grain pickers, not nitpickers. even when it challenges rules or traditions. Obedience matters when it flows from a heart that has first been transformed by God's grace. Are we guardians of mercy, or gatekeepers of rules? Do we follow the example of Christ. or the Pharisees? The Lord of the Sabbath calls us to compassion, kindness, and doing good because in Jesus (grace and mercy personified), the law is fulfilled. So, motivated by the grace which is ours because of Jesus, who can we show mercy and compassion to today, even if it challenges rules and tradition? AMEN