

Answering the Pharisees, part 2 (Luke 6:1-11)

Sunday school October 16, 2016

I want to call your attention to **READ Luke 6:1-11**. This block of text continues a sequence of answers Jesus gave to questions asked of Him by the Pharisees. We studied His first two answers at the end of chapter 5 last week. They asked Him, “why don’t your disciples fast like we and the disciples of John the Baptist fast?” That was verse 33. His answer was, “Now is not the time for fasting. It is a time for celebration because people like the publican Levi are choosing to follow the Lord.” That reminded us that we need to celebrate our successes as well as learn from our failures. The second answer He gave them was the parable of the old versus the new, the old garment, old wine, and old bottles versus the new garment, wine, and bottles. His point was that they, the Pharisees, were not willing to change when God needed them to change. There are two things that don’t change: God never changes, and God’s word never changes. But people do change, and we have to be willing to change when it is necessary to further His kingdom.

That brings us to His last two answers, which are the text we read at the outset. The key word in this text is the word “sabbath;” it appears 6 times in these 11 verses. The key verse is **READ v. 5**. Once again He is trying to persuade them about who He is, that He is God. He created the sabbath, He created the universe, and He gave the law that contains the sabbath to begin with. So when He says, “Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath,” His point is that He as God has the authority to determine what is appropriate to do on the sabbath. They as men do not. It all comes back to who He is, and that was the main point He was trying to make to them during His earthly ministry. They don’t believe in Him, so that point doesn’t go over too well, as we will see. But this is really another attempt to convince them about who He is.

Transition: So let me hand out outlines. These outlines start at III. because we did the first two last week. The next answer He gave them has to do with...

III. Plucking Corn The first part of this is...

IIIA. The Legal Question READ v. 1-2 There are three Old Testament laws in play with the disciples’ actions here, and I have listed them for you in your outlines.

- **Exodus 20:8-11** This is the point in the law where the sabbath day is established, and it tells us that the reason for the sabbath has to do with the creation of the universe. God rested on the seventh day after creating the earth in six, not because He was tired like we get after we work for 6 days but because His creation work was finished. So the sabbath was put in place to remind the Jews that the God they worship is the Creator God, the One who created the universe in 6 days. On a side note, this is one reason I believe in a literal 7 day creation: the sabbath law is complete symbolism with no substance otherwise. But it establishes the sabbath and gives as rationale for it the created order.
- **Exodus 34:21** This law clarifies that the sabbath law, the day of rest, still applies during times of harvest. When I lived in Ohio, about this time of year if you drove around farm country at night you would see farmers with lights on their tractors and farm equipment out in the fields at night. They had to get their crop harvested before it was lost. This verse clarifies that the extra work that had to be done at harvest is not an excuse for failing to observe the sabbath. You and everyone around you has to observe the sabbath even during busy times like harvest.
- **Deut. 23:25** This law describes what the disciples were doing. It creates a distinction between plucking ears of corn with your hand to scratch out a meal, especially for the poor, widow, or orphan, and harvesting with the sickle. Plucking with your hand from your neighbor's field was legal; harvesting with a sickle from your neighbor's field was not. The disciples were plucking ears of corn, so their actions were covered under this exception.

So God's law says that their actions of plucking ears of corn to get a meal on the sabbath was not harvesting and therefore legal. However, the Pharisees' interpretation of the law (not anything in the law itself but the Pharisees' interpretation of the law) said it was harvesting. Remember the main trap I told you the Pharisees fell into: they gave their interpretations, rituals, and traditions the same authority as God's word. So when God's law said the disciples' actions were legal but the Pharisees' interpretation said it was not, the Pharisees sided with their interpretation. That led to the accusation of unlawful acts in verse 2.

Transition: Next, from Jesus we get...

IIIB. The Non-legal Answer READ v. 3-5 Based on what we now understand about what God's law says about this situation, we might expect Jesus to go into a detailed legal explanation like we just did about why the Pharisees' interpretation was wrong, but that's not what He does. Instead, He refers to an incident from I Samuel 21:1-6 that seems to have nothing to do with the current incident other than hunger. David and his people were hungry when they showed up at the house of God just like His disciples were hungry on the sabbath day. So what is His point? He's making a couple of points. One is that in both cases followers of God did something that was considered, rightly or wrongly, to be unlawful to satisfy a human need, namely the need for food. Therefore, both David and His disciples were within the spirit of the law even if the specific action would normally be unlawful.

But the bigger point He is making is in verse 5. As I mentioned in the introduction, verse 5 is a reference to who He is, the fact that He is God. So He is saying that His interpretation of the sabbath laws as demonstrated by His actions is better than theirs because He is God. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, so none of us can interpret scripture better than God can. Some people take their own ideas and import them onto scripture and claim that scripture says something God never intended it to say. Liberals especially tend to fall into that trap, but we all can if we try to speak to scripture rather than letting scripture speak to us. Scripture pretty much interprets itself. If you get a Bible study outline from me or anyone that doesn't have many scripture references other than the passage being studied, that is not a good thing. Nobody interprets scripture better than God does, so you have to use scripture to interpret scripture.

One last detail to notice here. Notice in verse 2, when the Pharisees ask the question, "Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?" That "ye" there is second person plural, so the Pharisees are asking the entire group of disciples, "Why are all y'all doing this?" Notice they don't all answer; Jesus answers for them. That's a beautiful picture of Jesus' intercessory ministry for us today. When Satan or one of his servants accuses us before God, we don't answer that. Jesus answers for us, "that's one of my people. It's covered by my sacrifice." I just wanted to make sure you noticed how that went there.

Transition: The last incident in terms of answering the Pharisees is....

IV. Healing a Man's Hand, which is verses 6-11. Jesus had healed people on the sabbath day many times before. In Luke 4:31-39, Jesus cast devils out of a man in the synagogue and then healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, both on a sabbath day. It tells us He did many other healings as the sun was going down that day, and He did it all with no opposition from the scribes and Pharisees. Now times are changing. If you look down to **READ v. 11**. This time, the Pharisees get furious, and they start to plot to take Him down.

Transition: You could see that coming when they come...

IVA. Looking for a Fight READ v. 6-7 It is impossible to get along with or satisfy people who have this kind of spirit toward you. I gave you a couple of references from Proverbs that I will read to you. Proverbs 21:19: "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman." If one spouse is criticizing and seeking to pick a fight with the other all the time, that relationship won't survive. You're better off to be by yourself in the wilderness than to be in that kind of relationship. Also, Proverbs 26:21: "As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife." If you go looking for ways to feed the fire, you will find them. If you go looking for reasons to criticize someone, you will find them because we all do things that are worthy of criticism. Applying this principle to a church setting, if you go looking for a reason to criticize a pastor or a church leader, you will find it. With our Pastor, it may take you awhile because he is really good, but you will find it.

The first application here is: don't be the kind of person that is always looking to criticize someone else. I was sitting in my office down at University this past week, and I heard some other faculty talking outside my door. As I listened to them, I gleaned that they were upset at University administration. Apparently the University recently paid \$1.5 million for a house and property that subsequently appraised for \$600 thousand. As a result, we can't hire any new faculty, and nobody is getting a raise this year. Once I figured out what they were talking about, I really didn't want to be a part of that conversation. Obviously a mistake was made, but I don't want to have that kind of attitude toward administration. There is enough evil out there to righteously criticize that there is no need to go looking for more things. Don't have a critical spirit. Don't go looking for reasons to criticize.

Transition: Last point...

IVB. Doing Good Anyway READ v. 8-10 The situation Jesus was dealing with here was not a life-threatening or urgent situation like starvation at the beginning of the chapter, and Jesus knew the Pharisees were looking for a reason to criticize and accuse Him of wrongdoing. So if He wanted to avoid the confrontation with the Pharisees, He could have done it. He could have waited another day, or He could have taken him into a side room and healed him in private. Instead, He tells him to rise up, stand in the middle of the room, and stretch out his hand so that everyone in the room could see what He was doing. So Jesus knows the confrontation He is bringing on, but He heals him anyway. The reason He gives is in **READ verse 9**. He asks this question to them, that is, to the Pharisees, and it's not a trick question. The answer is it is always lawful to do good and save life. It is never lawful to do evil or destroy life unless you have a really good reason like self-defense. The Pharisees don't answer the question because the answer proves that the accusation they intend to bring is false. So Jesus knows that doing good, healing the man's hand in this case, was going to bring on criticism, but He chooses to do good anyway.

The application is: if you are going to serve in any kind of leadership capacity, especially in a church setting but really anywhere, you are going to encounter people who are looking for reasons to criticize you. How you respond to that will go a long way toward determining your success. Don't let it bother you when people look for reasons to criticize you. If you've done something worthy of criticism, as we all have, take the grain of truth that is in the criticism, accept it, and learn from it. But don't do things in order to appease your critics. Do things because they are good and because they are the right things to do. If you do good ministry, people will criticize you. Do good ministry anyway.

Conclusion

As a final thought for this week, there is a fairly famous poem entitled “The Paradoxical Commandments” written in 1968 by Dr. Kent M. Keith. He was also the originator of the idea of the silent majority. Some people attribute this poem to Mother Theresa, but she got it from Dr. Keith. I’ll read to you a little of it. **READ poem** The point is God is the one who ultimately determines what is good and evil, right and wrong; not us, and not our critics. We can get some discernment on those issues by reading His word, but the judgment ultimately is made by Him. So don’t get derailed by people who look for reasons to criticize you. Just keep doing good ministry. Keep doing what God has called you to do.