



## **Luke 6:1–5**

6 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields, and his disciples began to pick some ears of corn, rub them in their hands and eat the grain. 2 Some of the Pharisees asked, ‘Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?’

3 Jesus answered them, ‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God,

and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.’ 5 Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’

## **Reflection**

In Luke’s biographical account of the life of Jesus Christ we’ve seen that Jesus’ early ministry in Galilee was met with almost universal popularity. Jesus astounds and convicts people from all walks of life through the authority of his teaching. What’s more Jesus’ preaching is dramatically punctuated by miracles, healings and exorcisms that demonstrate the truth of what he is saying, and the authority with which he

says, in a manner perhaps even louder than his words themselves.

But as the news of Jesus has spread right throughout Galilee and Judea Jesus has begun to arouse interest amongst the Jewish religious elite who've travelled as far as Jerusalem to witness his miracles and assess his teaching. They're viewing Jesus with a more critical eye than the general populace and have begun to see strange, perhaps even dangerous tendencies in what Jesus is saying and doing – and even more importantly, the dangerous influence to their vested interests that Jesus is beginning to have on his growing numbers of followers.

And so over the past couple of weeks we've begun to sense the temperature ris-

ing between Jesus and the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They've taken exception to Jesus' claim to be able to forgive sins, but could hardly do more than object, astonished as all were by Jesus healing a paralytic with a word. Next they've begun to question Jesus over his habits of dining with tax collectors and sinners and his disciples' neglect of fasting – one of the pillars of Jewish religious observance. But far from trying to placate this opposition, far from trying to keep the peace, over the course of chapter six Jesus seems to deliberately aggravate them further.

This began in earnest yesterday when Jesus effectively said through his parables about patches on garments and new wine in old wineskins that he could not and would not be integrated into, or contained by,

pre-existing structures, even Judaism, Torah and synagogue. Judaism, as good as it once was, had become an old, worn-out garment. It could not be patched with a few things taken from Christ's gospel. The old is passing away, the new is here; and it is better by far. And so it is no wonder that the Jewish religious establishment, sensing their power base eroding and the very pillars of Judaism as they saw it being questioned, begin to be more openly antagonistic towards Jesus and his teaching. And Jesus, as we'll soon see, is not one to take a backward step.

This tension becomes increasingly pronounced in chapter 6, beginning with today's passage from Luke 6:1–5,

6 One Sabbath Jesus was going

through the cornfields, and his disciples began to pick some ears of corn, rub them in their hands and eat the grain. 2 Some of the Pharisees asked, 'Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?' 3 Jesus answered them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.' 5 Then Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'

Before diving into today's passage it is important to establish one thing. Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament

law, but to fulfil it (Matt 5:17). The problem is that Jewish interpretation of the law had drifted so far from what is prescribed in Scripture that their practice had begun to contradict God's intentions behind the law. As the Son of God, Jesus held teachers of God's word to the highest standards and the Pharisees and teachers of the law through their suffocating traditions that they had layered on top of God's word were leading people away from God instead of towards him. Jesus' teaching and example, like new wine causing old wineskins to burst, was incompatible with first-century Jewish practices but perfectly aligned with God's intentions behind the law as revealed in the Old Testament. Jesus came then, both to reform Judaism, to set it back on track, as well as to complete and fulfil the Jewish Scriptures.

A great example is today's passage. In Exodus 20 God gave Israel the ten commandments which form the foundation of the Old Testament law. The fourth commandment reads,

8 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labour and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord



blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

This wasn't enough for the Jewish religious leaders however who down through the centuries had layered extra rules on top of the Bible. At this point in time they had developed a series of thirty-nine clarifications of work, each with endless subdivisions. According to their additions to Scripture Jesus' disciples in picking heads of grain were guilty of a combination of reaping, threshing, and food preparation – all of which they deemed to be breaches of the Sabbath. In their suffocating detail they'd long lost the principles behind the law, as Jesus elsewhere pronounces forebodingly,

‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and

Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.  
Matthew 23:23

But the point that Jesus is making today is an even greater one than this. And to do so he replies to their accusations with these words,

‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave

some to his companions.’ 5 Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’

In the Old Testament, King David, in a time of urgent need directly contravened the Sabbath. And one greater than David is now here; the one David spoke about, his descendant, who would reign on his throne forever, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Just as Scripture condoned David breaking the Sabbath in a time of urgent need how much more license does the Messiah and his followers have as they go about his urgent mission on earth to do the same? Let alone the fact that the Son of Man (Jesus’ favourite term for himself in the Gospels) is the Lord of the Sabbath.

**Think & Pray**

I'm not sure if you think much about the Sabbath. Some Christians hold to it quite religiously, setting aside Sunday as a day for church and rest. Many Christians say that they divide their Sabbath up into small portions throughout the week. And most modern Christians will recognise the importance of rest in their lives, perhaps pointing to the pattern God set for humankind in Genesis 2 when God rested from his work of creation on the seventh day. But I think we need to look to Jesus to understand how we should observe the Sabbath post New Testament times. In our passage today, he says,

‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’

And thus, it is Jesus who now interprets the Sabbath for us. So, at the most basic level what we see Jesus and his disciples doing on the Sabbath becomes the model for us – and they certainly never lose sight of justice, mercy, faithfulness, mission and love in their observance of periods of rest. And at a deeper level, it is important to understand that in fulfilling the Old Testament Jesus has become the Sabbath for the people of God because in his person he supplies everything the Sabbath was meant to give – peace, rest, restoration and communion.

Spend some time today reflecting over Jesus' teaching and example when it comes to Sabbath and rest. And then ask God to help you find Sabbath rest today in him – peace, rest, restoration, regeneration and

renewal in Jesus.