

The unfolding of your words gives light.

## To Seek and to Save

### *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*

<sup>6:1</sup> Now it happened that He was passing through *some* grainfields on a Sabbath<sup>a</sup>; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating *the grain*<sup>b</sup>. <sup>2</sup>But some of the Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath<sup>c</sup>?” <sup>3</sup>And Jesus answering them said, “Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry<sup>d</sup>, he and

<sup>a</sup> **6:1 He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath.** The kind of grain grown in Galilee would have been barley or wheat.

<sup>b</sup> **6:1 His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain.** This statement helps us pinpoint the time of year this event took place. Wheat and barley would have been ready to eat in April or May. This means there were less than two years left of Jesus’ three-year public ministry.

The law of Moses permitted picking grain for personal consumption. What you could not do was carry a sickle into your neighbor’s field (Deuteronomy 23:24-25).

<sup>c</sup> **6:2 some of the Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”** In the eyes of these men the idea of what was unlawful had more to do with the authority of those who sat in the seat of Moses than with the actual law of Moses. Alfred Edersheim, in his *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, explains some rabbinic Sabbath prohibitions:

Next, certain regulations are laid down to guide the Jew when dressing on the Sabbath morning, so as to prevent his breaking its rest. Hence he must be careful not to put on any dress which might become burdensome, nor to wear any ornament which he might put off and carry in his hand, for this would be a 'burden.' A woman must not wear such headgear as would require unloosing before taking a bath, nor go out with such ornaments as could be taken off in the street, such as a frontlet, unless it is attached to the cap, nor with a gold crown, nor with a necklace or nose-ring, nor with rings, nor have a pin in her dress. The reason for this prohibition of ornaments was, that in their vanity women might take them off to show them to their companions, and then, forgetful to the day, carry them, which would be a 'burden.' Women are also forbidden to look in the glass on the Sabbath, because they might discover a white hair and attempt to pull it out, which would be a grievous sin; but men ought not to use looking-glasses even on weekdays, because this was undignified. A woman may walk about her own court, but not in the streets, with false hair. Similarly, a man was forbidden to wear on the Sabbath wooden shoes studded with nails, or only one shoe, as this would involve labour; nor was he to wear phylacteries nor amulets, unless, indeed, they had been made by competent persons (since they might lift them off in order to show the novelty). Similarly, it was forbidden to wear any part of a suit of armour. It was not lawful to scrape shoes, except perhaps with the back of a knife, but they might be touched with oil or water. Nor should sandals be softened with oil, because that would improve them. It was a very serious question, which led to much discussion, what should be done if the tie of a sandal had broken on the Sabbath. A plaster might be worn, provided its object was to prevent the wound from getting worse, not to heal it, for that would have been a work. Ornaments which could not easily be taken off might be worn in one's courtyard. Similarly, a person might go about with wadding in his ear, but not with false teeth nor with a gold plug in the tooth. If the wadding fell out of the ear, it could not be replaced. Some indeed, thought that its healing virtues lay in the oil in which it had been soaked, and which had dried up, but others ascribed them to the warmth of the wadding itself. In either case there was danger of healing - of doing anything for the purpose of a cure - and hence wadding might not be put into the ear on the Sabbath, although if worn before it might be continued. Again, as regarded false teeth: they might fall out, and the wearer might then lift and carry them, which would be sinful on the Sabbath. But anything which formed part of the ordinary dress of a person might be worn also on the Sabbath, and children whose ears were being bored might have a plug put into the hole. It was also allowed to go about on crutches, or with a wooden leg, and children might have bells on their dresses; but it was prohibited to walk on stilts, or to carry any heathen amulet. (*Life and Times...* Appendix 17)

In the eyes of the Pharisees these men had sown, threshed, winnowed and possible borne excessive burdens on the Sabbath.

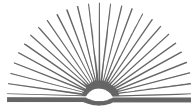
<sup>d</sup> **6:3 Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry.** This was a common accusation of Jesus toward Israel's religious leaders who should have known both the content and proper application of the law of Moses (emphasis added):

The Gospel of Luke  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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those who were with him, <sup>4</sup>how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone<sup>a</sup>, and gave it to his companions?" <sup>5</sup>And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath<sup>b</sup>."

<sup>6</sup>On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered<sup>c</sup>. <sup>7</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely

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Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, Matthew 12:3

Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? Matthew 12:5

Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, Matthew 19:4

But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: Matthew 22:31

Have you not even read this Scripture: "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES"? Mark 12:10-11

This was a serious rebuke. Of course they had read it—more than anyone. His point must have been: "Then why don't you get it?"

Matthew's parallel account to this one records (12:1-7) that Jesus also used the priests who "work" on the Sabbath as an illustration of what is lawful on the Sabbath.

<sup>a</sup> 6:4 **took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone.** On the surface it appears that Jesus was rationalizing that ends justify means. Some would say that Jesus was saying, "Sometimes you gotta break the rules." But there this is much more than that here.

The story about David to which Jesus refers is found in 1 Samuel 21-1-6. David was running from Saul and he and his men were hungry. The "consecrated bread" that sat, in David's day, in the tabernacle's Holy Place was intended only for the priests:

Then you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. You shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD. You shall put pure frankincense on each row that it may be a memorial portion for the bread, even an offering by fire to the LORD. Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD'S offerings by fire, his portion forever. Leviticus 24:5-9

Jesus' point is not: "David did it, so it must be okay." His point is that, while the law of God is our final authority, we must not use it as an excuse to withhold good or to do harm. Ahimelech was a faithful priest, but only questioned whether the hungry men who approached were ceremonially pure.

<sup>b</sup> 6:5 **He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."** Here is the most common way Jesus referred to Himself. Both His deity and His humanity come across in this statement.

Mark's parallel account adds these words (Mark 2:27): "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

<sup>c</sup> 6:6 **He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered.** The word "withered" means "dry" or "shriveled." Luke later records Jesus using this word "dry" to contrast the verdant pastures of His presence with the lifeless revelatory silence of His absence. He prophesied imminent hard times to the daughters of Jerusalem as He ascended Calvary's hill, saying:

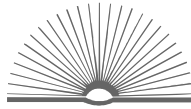
For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry? Luke 23:31

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to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find *reason* to accuse Him<sup>a</sup>. <sup>8</sup>But He knew what they were thinking<sup>b</sup>, and He said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come forward<sup>c</sup>!” And he got up and came forward. <sup>9</sup>And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it<sup>d</sup>?” <sup>10</sup>After looking around at them all, He said to him, “Stretch out your hand<sup>e</sup>!” And he did so; and his hand was restored<sup>f</sup>. <sup>11</sup>But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus<sup>g, h</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> 6:7 **The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him.** This reveals the character of these Pharisees. They were more interested in bringing Jesus down than in obeying the commands of God.

<sup>b</sup> 6:8 **He knew what they were thinking.** The Lord Jesus at times limited His omniscience (Matthew 24:36), but not here.

<sup>c</sup> 6:8 **Get up and come forward!** Mark 3:5 says that Jesus was “grieved at their hardness of heart” at this point.

<sup>d</sup> 6:9 **is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?** This question brought out the real issue before the people. The Sabbath law was not designed to ignore compassion or bring harm. Matthew adds that Jesus looked around and asked,

What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? Matthew 12:11

<sup>e</sup> 6:10 **After looking around at them all, He said to him, “Stretch out your hand!”** It may seem odd that our Lord would call a man to do what he had no power to do. The hand was withered. This is grace.

<sup>f</sup> 6:10 **he did so; and his hand was restored.** The word “restored” carries the idea of being brought back to normal. It is used of the restoration of the earth under the rule of God (Matthew 17:11; Mark 9:12; Acts 1:6).

<sup>g</sup> 6:11 **they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.** The leaders were angry about what? Their standards—not God’s—were violated. The Lord Jesus not only did the compassionate thing, He did a work that pointed once again (remember the paralytic) to His authority to interpret Scripture and His power over the physical world.

<sup>h</sup> 6:1-11 When you value your tradition and stubborn opinions over the authority of God’s word, you become desensitized to your own sins and to the needs around you. The first temptation of the devil in Genesis 3 was an attempt to get Eve to question God’s direct statements. Spiritual blindness or prejudice makes you miss the truth of Scripture, miss opportunities to show compassion and ultimately Jesus. Here are some reasons why you need to overcome your prejudices:

1. They turn you into a private investigator instead of a fellow-struggler. The religious leaders were so determined to find fault with anyone outside their circle that they failed to show compassion. The Son of Man was touched with the feelings of our infirmities. He made us, but He is one of us. He knows that we are dust so He remains patient.
2. They cause you to major on minors instead of dealing with real problems. The Pharisees were so caught up in keeping the first table of the law (love God) that they neglected the second (love neighbor). Our Great High Priest serves His people because He loves the Father.
3. They make you a poor listener instead of a humble learner. The system of belief of the Pharisees was so detailed that they overlooked the plain *interpretation* of the Scripture. The Designer of the human ear knew that God’s laws are both for His glory and our good.
4. They leave you caring more for your rules than for people. The system of belief of the Pharisees was so detailed that they overlooked the plain *application* of the Scripture. The Lawgiver never intended that we should have to add to the Scripture.

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5. They blind you with rage rather than increase your patience. The religious leaders were much more impatient with violation of their standards than they were with actual sin. Our gentle and sinless Savior served sinners in the midst of a crooked world.

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