

1. Introduction

Good morning! In **Exodus 20:8-10a**, God commands, **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor 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.”** The Sabbath day, also called Saturday or Shabbat, was set aside by God for worship and rest. But in memory of Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1), the early church moved worship to Sunday (Acts 20:7). A few Christians argue that we should still worship on Saturday, but most Bible scholars consider the change to Sunday as appropriate, because the resurrection of Jesus introduced a new era in God’s work. In any case, I think what is most important is the principle of taking time for worship and rest one day each week; which day is not the main issue.

For many Jews though, Shabbat has a far deeper meaning than most of us can understand. The Jewish activist, Ahad Ha'am (1856-1927), is credited with saying, *“More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.”* The point of this statement is that observing Sabbath is not just something that Jews do; it is more. For many Jews it defines who they are and maintains their identity. The Friday evening Sabbath dinner, the familiar songs and sayings, the greeting, *“Shabbat Shalom,”* that is, “Sabbath Peace,” these traditions go to the core of the Jewish identity. Some of these things are commanded in the Old Testament, but others are just traditions.



We also have many traditions in the church, but our identity does not come from our church practices or traditions, or even from our country of origin or race. Our identity as Christians rests in Jesus Christ and our relationship to Him. If someone asks, “Who are you?” We can confidently answer from **Philippians 3:20**, **“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Lets read the Scripture for today, Luke 6:1-11.



2. Scripture Luke 6:1-11 (NIV)

[1] One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. [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." [6] On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. [7] The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. [8] But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. [9] Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" [10] He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. [11] But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

3. Teaching

Jesus and the disciples were walking through the fields and the disciples were hungry. So the disciples began to snack on the grain as they walked. By the way, perhaps I should mention that although the King James Bible says, “corn fields,” and, “ears of corn,” there was no corn in Israel or in Europe until the 16th century, when it was imported from America. The King James Bible translation is not wrong, it



is just that four hundred years ago the English word, “corn,” was used for all kinds of grain, but since then the meaning has changed. The grain the disciples were eating would have been either barley or wheat, not corn.

In the culture of the time, what the disciples were doing would usually have been OK. People probably ate small amounts from the fields all the time as they walked past. But this particular day was the Sabbath, and the Pharisees objected. **Luke 6:2, “Some of the Pharisees asked, ‘Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?’”**

Jesus responded by reminding them of the time, recorded in **1 Samuel 21**, when David was hungry and he took the special bread that had been offered to God and ate it, sharing it with his men. According to the Law of Moses, David should not have done this, only the priests were permitted to eat this bread. But the example showed that meeting human need was more important than the details of the ceremonial law.



Luke 6:5, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’” Jesus is the Son of God and He has authority over all things, but in **Mark 2:27**, it tells us that Jesus also said, **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”** Considering this, I think Jesus’ point here was that the Sabbath was meant to be a blessing to mankind, not a burden. The Sabbath ensured that people had adequate rest and time to worship. It is important for us to work hard to earn a living, but it is also important for us to get adequate rest. We can trust the Lord to meet our needs.

Luke 6:6-7, “On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.” Here, the Pharisees and teachers of the law clearly have bad intentions. They wanted to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. And they thought they had a chance, because they had interpreted the Law of Moses to mean that healing a person on the Sabbath was against the Law, because they considered healing to be work.

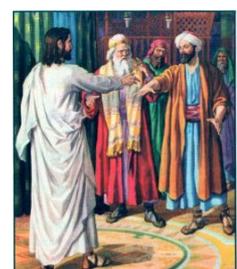
Luke 6:8, “But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” So he got up and stood there.” Can you imagine the scene? The man is standing in the middle, waiting to see if Jesus will help him. The Pharisees are watching Jesus closely, desiring to accuse Him. And Jesus is looking at their hearts. I think Jesus must have been very sad at what He saw. The hearts of the Pharisees were dark with anger. Perhaps they had started out well at one time, just desiring to be obedient to God. But somehow their hearts had gone far away from God’s heart. They were not waiting in hope for a miracle of healing to bless the man with the shriveled hand. They were waiting in anger with the intention of accusing Jesus of wrongdoing.

Luke 6:9, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?’” With this question, Jesus gives them a chance to realize how wrong their attitudes are. It is not such a difficult question. But apparently no one was willing to answer. It is a very sad thing when people are not willing to affirm that God’s heart is for people to do good and save life.

Now, it would be easy for us to continue talking about the Pharisees and about how dark their hearts were, but it would be wiser for us to examine our own hearts. Like a kitten who sees a lion in the mirror, all too often we see only what we want to see about ourselves. But we need to be honest with ourselves and with the Lord. Do we allow our cultural or religious traditions to blind us to what is right and wrong? Do we look for opportunities to trap or accuse others? When Jesus look at our hearts, is He pleased with what He sees?



Luke 6:10, “He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was completely restored.” The Lord Jesus brings healing and restoration to those who trust in Him. This miraculous healing should have brought great rejoicing, and for the man, his family, and friends, I am sure that it did. But sadly, not everyone was happy. The Pharisees,

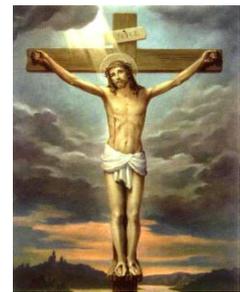


in fact, were very angry. Their anger blinded them to the goodness and love of God and they refused to rejoice in the miracle.

Luke 6:11, “But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.” Matthew tells us more specifically about the Pharisees’ plans. **Matthew 12:14, “But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.”** Here is a mystery. Even if they felt that Jesus had embarrassed them, that would not be reason to want to kill Jesus. Why were the Pharisees so angry?

I think part of the answer is to be found in what I shared earlier. It has to do with the attitude of these Pharisees concerning their own identity. Even at that time, for many Jews, observance of the Sabbath was very important to their understanding of their identity as a people. And the Pharisees were used to being the respected experts on the rules of the Sabbath. When Jesus began to point out that their thinking was wrong, He was not just disagreeing with them, He was threatening their identity. To tell a Pharisee that he was wrong about their Sabbath rules would be like telling a Japanese tea master that he was making the tea wrong.

The anger of the Pharisees grew as Jesus continued to heal people and preach the love of God. And in the end, the Pharisees were sure that they had found a way to get rid of Jesus. **Matthew 27:22, ““What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!”** And Jesus was crucified. Jesus died a terrible death, so that we might have the free gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in Him. But that was not the end of the story. Next Sunday we will celebrate Easter, and we will give thanks for the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus died, but on the third day He rose from the dead. Jesus is alive and He is here with us now.



4. Conclusion

This week let us take time to examine our own hearts deeply and honestly. And if we have been fooling ourselves about who we are, or if we have been hiding dark things in our hearts, then let’s turn to Jesus and confess our sins and receive forgiveness. And, I pray that none of us would rely on our earthly nationality or any kind of traditions for our identity and salvation. We should rely instead on Jesus alone and give thanks for the heavenly citizenship that He has given to all who trust in Him. Let us close with the words of blessing found in **Jude 1:24-25, “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- [25] to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”**

5. Closing Prayer