

04/27/2025 - Luke 6:1-11 - "Real Religion"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] Our gospel reading today is found in Luke chapter 6. This is the gospel of Luke chapter 6.

On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands.

But some of the Pharisees said, Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? And Jesus answered them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and he and those who were with him?

How he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those with him.

And he said to them, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered.

[1 : 37] And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. He knew their thoughts.

And he said to the man with the withered hand, Come and stand here. And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, I ask you, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?

And after looking around at them, all he said to him, Stretch out your hand. And he did so.

And his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and disgust with one another what they might do to Jesus.

This is God's word. A theologian from the 20th century, early 20th century named Francis Schaeffer.

[2 : 51] He was particularly interested and devoted to engaging the culture with truth. Francis Schaeffer.

And he quotes, Biblical orthodoxy without compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world. Biblical orthodoxy without compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world. This is certainly true. I heard a lot of agreements in such a statement like that. So I'm glad that we're all in agreement. We can close in prayer. Call Bob Evans and move your reservation up.

In our world today, mercy is often mistaken for compromise. To show mercy is to lower standards.

[4 : 01] But real mercy doesn't lower God's standards at all. Mercy is a way of reflecting the heart of God. You don't hear much about the mercy of the church in the news, do you?

No. You don't hear much of it at all. You won't see any headlines, any headlines, about Christians in the SBC, that conservative group of Christians leading in disaster relief, following the American Red Cross to all the disaster areas down in Florida.

You won't hear about that. You won't hear about the Christians running homeless shelters very well. You won't hear the statistics of Christians leading the charge in adoption of orphans or the founding of hospitals.

This is historic. History proves, just as we read from William Wilberforce, his abolition efforts of the days of the old to the founding of many of the Ivy League schools that we have.

Harvard was founded by the Puritans. He's rolling over in his grave of what's going on at Harvard.

Yeah, he is. Princeton, founded by the Presbyterians, and Brown, founded by the Baptists.

[5 : 34] Christians have been leading the way. But no matter what the world says about the matter, here's the truth. real faith doesn't just believe rightly.

It lives mercifully. Mercifully. Real faith doesn't just believe rightly. It lives mercifully.

And this isn't just convenient mercy that kind of fits in your agenda throughout the day or the week. It's not Instagrammable mercy that you've got to broadcast to everyone to show how holy and righteous that you are.

But it's costly, inconvenient, uncomfortable at times. Jesus shaped mercy. God made his heart clear in the Gospel of Matthew and a lot of parallel accounts that we've been unfolding and even today.

He makes it clear what we don't find in the Gospel of Luke. We find in Matthew. And Jesus says, he quotes Hosea 6, verse 6, where it says, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, an acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

[6 : 57] This is the unfolding of the great commandments. The first being to love God and the second being like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

this is the second side of that coin. You see, if Christ is in us, if you are a Christian, if Christ is in you, the mark of that will unfold as mercy towards others.

This is important because mercy is the outflow of Christ in us. It's the fruit that verifies Christ in us. You see this even in Paul's own writing in 1 Timothy 1, verse 16.

He received mercy to be an example of mercy. And today, we'll watch Jesus embody this scandalous mercy in two scenes.

The first in a grain field and then the other in the synagogue, both on different Sabbath days. And Jesus is giving us a lesson about the Sabbath, how to understand the Sabbath.

[8 : 10] And if Christianity gains any favor to the watching world, it's not going to be because we out-argue them. It's not going to come because we out-vote them.

It's going to come because we out-love them. We out-love the world. This is how it's always been, even if the news doesn't put it on the headline.

What we'll see today is the main point that real religion is measured not by how well we defend doctrine, but by how deeply we display mercy.

The sermon title today is Real Religion. And I'd like to pray before we get into these two sections of the passage. It would help if my notes were not upside down.

Now we're good. Let's pray. Father, thank you for giving us this time to set aside the noise of the world to lift our voices in song today, to cut the instrumentation out, and just to hear the voices that you've given breath to, to exhale your praise.

[9 : 36] What a beautiful thing it is to praise the Lord. There's none like it. Thank you for this opportunity, and as we continue that worship by looking upon your word, help us to be changed and transformed, to leave different than the state of which we came.

Help us to see Jesus Christ today in his full glory and splendor. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The first section is we're going to see mercy in the grain fields, and here is a Sabbath day.

Jesus and his disciples are out. Don't know what they're doing, but they're out, and they're clearly hungry. And what they do, they pluck some grain from a field, and they ate the grain.

Simple. You're hungry, you eat. It's a natural principle. Sometimes we have the opposite problem because we are, no, not the opposite problem, we have an amplified problem.

We eat too much when we're hungry, especially ice cream. But we see mercy here in the grain field.

The Pharisees have an issue here because to them, the Sabbath meant that they are not to work.

[11 : 09] No work on the Sabbath. Right? And it's as if he's saying, you're not even allowed to digest food. You're not allowed to eat, it seems, on the Sabbath.

If you're not familiar with the Sabbath day, this is a creational principle that God wove into the very creation of all things.

Six days work, one day rest. He gave those principles in Exodus 20, verse 9 through 11. That's even prior to the law of Moses. We see that that's before the tablets.

And then Moses gave it in the fourth commandment, which is rooted in God's creation. And Sabbath observance is good. It is good to observe the Sabbath.

The moral law woven in creation itself, just like the prohibitions against murder and theft and things like that, and even creational principles of gender roles in the home and in the church.

[12 : 14] And so, what went wrong here? The Sabbath is supposed to be good. Why are you all mad? They're eating. That's not work. Well, the problem happens because these Jewish leaders, Pharisees, they've developed 39 clarifications of what the Sabbath work meant.

They clarified. They added to Scripture, we'll say. And this is found in the Mishnah, chapter 7, verse 2, which included reaping, which included threshing and winnowing.

So, in their minds, trying to trap Jesus and look at the fine line of their religious systems, they see these disciples essentially reaping, winnowing, and threshing as they eat the grain.

I mean, this is a gotcha moment here. The Pharisees were outraged in verse 2 because what they considered to be flagrant aggression against the law, they finally got Jesus trapped. We found Him in sin. until the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Son of God, reminds them of some important biblical theology.

[13:49] Jesus answered them in verse 3, have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those with him.

This is holy bread that David ate in 1 Samuel 21. Jesus says, you know nothing about the law, nothing, with your 39 clarifications that y'all hold to.

Now, this holy bread was designated bread. It would have been unthinkable to offer it to anyone other than the priest.

This is a standard of Leviticus 24 that detailed those regulations for special use of this bread to be consumed only by the priests. In 1 Samuel, we just went through a series in 1 Samuel not long ago, but I'll refresh your memory.

1 Samuel chapter 21, David was famished. He was on the run from King Saul. He was out to kill him. So Saul is a complete madman.

[15:24] David, his men are on the run, they're famished, and they seek provision from the priest Ahimelech. This priest was caught at this time.

Should I let this guy starve and all these guys starve? Or should I hold to and stick to my ritual system? The priest was stuck in between ritual obligations and spiritual obligations.

And the tension weighed upon him. David was given the bread of the presence. This priest broke from these rituals to fulfill the spirit of the law, the meaning of the law, which is good.

It is good. As David ate every bite of that bread and gave it to his men, God approved of it.

You see, in God's kingdom, Jesus is making something known, that mercy prioritizes people over religion, people over rituals.

[16:50] To exude in mercy is to actually put people first, and that is true religion. Religion is not bad.

This is a parallel account in Matthew chapter 12, verse 6 through 7. Jesus includes something here in the words from Isaiah 6, 6, and he says, I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.

If you had known what these words mean, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would have not condemned the innocent. Speaking in a parallel account with what's going on here in Luke, he's saying something, that in God's kingdom, mercy prioritizes people over rituals.

That is God's kingdom. And then finally, he puts the icing on the cake. He said to them, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus has authority, supremacy over all of it, even the bread of the presence. Jesus is the Sabbath.

[18:07] Real rest, real peace, real reflection. The Sabbath wasn't intended to be a ritual. The Sabbath was meant to be a moral principle and a way of life that he put in creation to remind us.

It's a sacred interruption to the rhythm of work throughout the week to worship, to rest, and to show mercy.

Six days work, one day rest, creation rhythm of life. And Jesus mercifully met his disciples' hunger and their needs, not with more rules, not by telling them, well, you've got to suck it up, buttercup, and just, you'll be fine.

Not as cynicism and harshness to your body, but he's providing their needs. This is radical compassion and provision. And today, church, we must honor this principle by gathering the first day of the week.

This is why the church gathers on the Lord's day, the Christian Sabbath, to remember that our deepest needs are met in Christ alone.

[19:29] Now, this is not just one hour on Sunday. It's the Lord's day, not the Lord's hour. All right? If I can step on some toes, this is an entire day from sunup to sundown of worship that testifies to that promise that our true rest and our designated time and our delight and our reflection of this day is God alone and that being Jesus Christ.

It's not scrutinizing rigid adherence, but worshipful service to Jesus Christ. There's another sermon that you can watch before Advent series in 2022 if you want more on that.

But there's something that he's challenging here. Mercy doesn't challenge man-made, mercy doesn't just challenge man-made rituals, but exposes hardened hearts.

Mercy does that. If the Pharisees were angered by mercy in the fields, they would be enraged by mercy in the synagogue. And we see that in the second section here in verse 6, on another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching.

And a man was there whose right hand was withered. In verse 7, and the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him.

[21 : 00] And here we have another Sabbath, and what seems to be another opportunity to trap Jesus. And if you could imagine this scene here, you got Jesus teaching a group of people, and one of those people, one of those souls in the room was a man with a very disfigured hand.

Odd-looking hand, we'll say. The Pharisees were lying in wait, just watching Christ's every move, not for truth, but for a trap.

And isn't this ironic? They hoped to accuse Jesus for showing mercy on the Sabbath day. It really doesn't matter how religious you are.

If you have no mercy for the hurting, you're lost. You're lost. No matter what day of the week it is. That's a sad reality here.

But Jesus here in verse 8, we see a little omniscience here. He knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, come and stand here.

[22 : 26] See, tension is rising, and the man rose and stood there. And in this scene, you got all people around, you got Jesus, and you got the Pharisees, and right in the middle, smack dab, is a man in need, a man hurting, a man who was directed to Jesus, by Jesus, to stand up just as Levi was from his booth.

And center stage is the afflicted man with this useless, dried-up hand to his right side. Jesus was preparing a sermon illustration here about the Sabbath, and Jesus spoke.

He said, I ask you, I think of Cliff, you know, that evangelist, the street evangelist that goes to the universities. I think of Cliff here for some reason. He said to them, I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life, to save life, or to destroy it?

He's making known God's economy here. God's economy refusing to do good in God's economy is to actually be doing harm.

One commentator said that good omitted is evil committed. Love that, how that rings.

[24 : 08] And so to refuse mercy is not to remain neutral. There is no remaining neutral. To refuse mercy is not neutral. It is evil. mercy demands action.

It doesn't deserve or demand observation. Mercy is action. And so as I imagine Cliff standing there in a room full of people walking around, it says, I think it's important to see that this was quite a moment.

The text doesn't give time much in here, but the wording does. In verse 10, and after looking around at them, I would imagine using this moment to make people think, to look at every face in the room, to make sure that they are thinking about what he just said.

I ask, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life, or to destroy it? Remember, this is in the synagogue.

And after looking around at all of them in this tomb-like silence, you can hear a pin drop, he said to the man, stretch out your hand.

[25 : 35] That's it. The man stretched his hand out, and his hand was restored. no smoke, no mirrors, literally a withered hand, a nub, suddenly grew fingers and was restored in the midst of them on the Sabbath.

He saw all their faces, he knew all of their hearts, hearts, and he healed this man who knew that he was in need.

No one had to remind him that he had a withered hand. He wakes up every day knowing that he needs something. Once shriveled, now stretched out, new, living, and whole.

surely this crowd would now believe, right? They would have to believe. I mean, y'all are seeing fingers and nails grow before your eyes.

Sign me up, I'm bought in, right? Or was this a Sabbath violation to restore somebody and to provide compassion and mercy?

[27 : 07] Well, in verse 11, we weren't left guessing, but they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

was they just the Pharisees? Was they all of them, third person of everyone in that room?

It doesn't really matter because this, according to the context of the people in this room, this was a violation to ever do such an act, regardless of how miraculous it was.

To say the least, I would imagine these Pharisees were definitely the ones infuriated the most. They were filled with madness.

This Greek word here for fury means senseless, like extreme rage. Right? Instead of repenting, they plotted here.

[28 : 15] And the self-righteous mind is never interested in mercy. The self-righteous mind is never interested in mercy because the self-righteous mind clings to regulations always and rejects mercy.

And so they rejected the Lord, the Lord of mercy who was standing before them. Jesus shows us that ritual obligation must always submit to spiritual obligation.

That is the emphasis and the expression of the law of God. God this is where Jesus' authority reigns and completely turns the status quo on its head.

It's the authority that sits with sinners as we saw weeks ago. Maybe a week ago. These weeks are running pretty long nowadays. It's the authority of Jesus that cleanses a leper and touches a leper and by that touch just that touch would declare Jesus unclean completely on its head.

And here we see that Jesus Christ has the authority over the Sabbath and he's always had it. The world isn't turned off by Christianity because they've studied the Bible.

[29 : 53] The world isn't turned off by that. They're turned off because they've seen Christians who resemble Pharisees rather than Jesus Christ.

Today real Christianity is not proven by having the right opinions but by becoming the right kind of people sanctifying ourselves in his word living his compassion through our lives and mercy knowing that at the foot of the cross is level ground by grace we have been saved through faith and that grace is available for all who believe.

The kind of people that we are becoming are those who reflect this costly inconvenient relentless mercy of Jesus Christ. And it's interesting to think too and I think it's important to flip the script a little bit because Martin Luther makes a paradoxical note about mercy.

Martin Luther says a Christian is perfectly free of all free of all and subject to no one except God himself right?

Free of all and subject to no one. But Luther says but also a Christian is perfectly dutiful a perfectly dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone.

[31 : 34] That we are free but we're also duty bound to something. What are we duty bound to? Mercy. Mercy.

May we be the kind of church where mercy is not rare but expected from us. Where Sabbath rest means worship, rest, and works of mercy for a hurting world.

Where the world wonders again at the beauty of Christ where they see his mercy in us. The religion God desires has never changed.

It's always been there. It's ingrained in the law. It's ingrained in the great commandments of Christ. Mercy, not sacrifice, hearts, not hollow rituals.

And I pray that the Lord would make it so here in Still Valley Church. religion is measured not by how well we defend doctrine, but how deeply we display mercy.

[32 : 48] Let's pray. voy voy