

The Lord of the Sabbath, Part 1

Luke 6:1-5

November 20, 2016

As we have been moving through Jesus' Galilean ministry, if you remember, Jesus' Galilean ministry started in chapter 4, verse 14, and goes all the way through chapter 9, verse 50. But even in these early chapters, we have been seeing an increase of opposition from the Jewish leadership. As Jesus exercises his Messianic prerogatives, as he executes his Father's perfect will, he's being led along all the while by the Holy Spirit. And Jesus' ministry, let's just say, it's making waves. It's like a bomb going off in some places with ripple effect. The concussion is spreading throughout the whole land.

And his actions, particularly on the Sabbath, his actions are making religious people uncomfortable. He operates without any real sense of concern for honoring traditions and customs of religion, and that's been causing some level of disruption to

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the power structures of the Jewish establishment. He didn't come in, intentioning to offend people, but nonetheless he was making them nervous. He was making them uncomfortable, and they are beginning to look for a way to remove the irritant, Jesus.

Consider the fact that Jesus started his ministry in Galilee rather than in Judea, rather than in the capital city of Jerusalem. That alone, that fact alone, was enough to rankle the sense of Jewish nationalistic pride because instead of seeking the blessing of the intellectual and cultural elites in Jerusalem, Jesus instead went to the country hillbillies of Galilee. He went to Galilee of, let's face it, it was Galilee of the Gentiles. It wasn't exactly known for its godliness. When he first chose his disciples, his early disciples, he didn't pander to the rabbis. He didn't go seek their opinion. He didn't kowtow to the Pharisees and the scribes. He didn't even go after recruiting some of their best students, which would have been a tip of the hat to the value of their education and their influence. Jesus bypassed all of them altogether.

Instead, he chose these despised Galileans, unlearned men, untrained fishermen, and the like. Even worse, he chose a tax collector for discipleship, as we read: Levi, a despised little Mocks. And he's about to add a political zealot to the group, along with a bunch of other social nobodies. And not only that, but he's about to name these men, twelve of them, as Apostles. That's part of what Luke wants us to see here in these opening chapters. He wants us to see in this subsection of the Galilean ministry that runs from 5:1-6:16 that this has to do with Jesus' prerogative to choose. It's Jesus' right to elect, to select, whoever he wants to.

He conducted himself and his ministry entirely according to the will of God. But as he did that, what he did, how he acted, what he said, all of that started to defy Jewish and human expectation. They expected him to be one way; he acted, and it was completely different than their expectations. The Jewish leaders, all the people who followed them, they believed they had a pretty good idea of what God was like. They put him into a pretty good box. They knew what it took to please God, thank you very much.

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Jesus came, when he acted, when he spoke, he completely baffled them. He exposed their, really, their ignorance. He exposed their pride. He exposed their selfish ambition, their willingness to use religion like a stick to beat people with, like chains to confine people with, like a way to control people. In all of his teaching, in all of his actions, he was making them actually angry.

That's why we have seen growing animosity, here. Started in the calling of Simon Peter, the calling of Matthew, and then it's culminating in the calling and commissioning of the Twelve to apostleship. This narrative is interspersed all along with this sense of conflict from the religious leaders of Israel. Notice after the first calling, if you just scan your eyes over your Bibles, the calling of the first disciples in Luke 5:1-11, there are two controversies that follow that about Jesus' healing. The first had to do with him touching a leper, in verses 12-16. And then, healing a paralytic in verses 17-26. Controversy followed those and the calling of Levi, 5:27-28. After calling him, there are two more controversies: one about eating and drinking with sinners, and another about the lack of fasting, austerity among the disciples.

Clearly, as we read over this and as we study it, we see that Jesus is innocent of all charges. What may have seemed at first glance by appear, all appearances, what may have seemed controversial, especially in a first-century context; what was made out by his enemies and his opponents to be an offensive aspect of his ministry; well, upon closer inspection, all their accusations have actually disintegrated, haven't they? There's nothing to them. There's no substance whatsoever. Jesus' detractors are exposed, here, as small-minded slanderers. They're driven by jealousy and pride and selfish ambition. They are slandering a perfectly-legitimate ministry, in fact, the only perfectly-legitimate ministry that there ever was, a ministry full of grace and truth.

The ministry that I came from in California, it was by no means perfect. No one would ever say that. But it was a ministry that was full of humble and godly people; very, very gracious and generous men and women who were diligent in study and in practice, loved the Lord, devoted to his truth. Nonetheless, our ministry was routinely attacked and slandered. Our senior

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pastor, John MacArthur, took the brunt of all, a lot of that attack.

The attacks were generally based on ignorant speculations from very critical-spirited religious people. It wasn't really the worldly people that cared. It was the religious people that wanted to put the crosshairs on our church and our pastor. Usually, time would tell how often those accusations had very little to do with truth, a lot to do with spiritual pride, a lot to do with fanciful speculations, even sounding much like conspiracy theories. And when you find at the heart of it, a lot of times there's a salacious sinfulness in the private life of many accusers. I could name case after case where that was so.

The Spirit expressly says, 1 Timothy 4:2, that things like this are going to happen against the truth in these last days. "People will speak lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared as with a hot iron." And that's going to happen with this ministry as well, folks. This church already has. I know some of you have had to deal with that kind of opposition. You need to know that it will continue, the more so as we remain faithful to

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truth, as we remain clear and pursue clarity about the truth in our proclamation, in our practice. The more effective we are in proclaiming Jesus Christ, well, the clearer we are about who he is, and what he wants, and how he wants us to act, and how he wants us to conduct church life, the more we're going to be persecuted for that clarity.

How do we know that? Because that is what happened with Jesus. And if it happened with him, it's going to happen with everybody who tries to most closely approximate him and his ministry. As it has happened with him, it'll happen with us as well. The more clearly we see in Scripture that the religious leaders saw Jesus, you know what? The more they hated him. Isn't that sad? They were so committed to their pride that they cut themselves off from the only source of truth, the only way of salvation.

Take a look at the text, starting in, reading in verse 1 of 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,

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'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, 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 priests 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. The scribes and Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so they might find a reason to accuse him. But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with a withered hand, 'Come, stand here.' And he arose and stood there. And Jesus said to him, '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 discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."

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Isn't that interesting? Jesus is the most amazing person they have ever encountered, bar none. They have come nearer than most people have ever come in all of human history to see him in action, to watch him up close, to hear his teaching. And the more they get to know him, the less they like him.

Religious leaders were drawn, Luke 5:17 tells us, they were drawn from every village of Galilee and Judea, and from even Jerusalem. They'd heard about Jesus casting out a demon on the Sabbath. Perhaps heard of him healing Peter's mother-in-law, also on the Sabbath. They heard about his cleansing of the leper, touching the leper with his own hand. So they traveled to Capernaum to check up on Jesus, to evaluate his ministry, and they found themselves increasingly offended by him, irritated, critical.

We don't read in any of these accounts any, any sense of affirmation or appreciation for him, just a chorus of critical comments and accusing questions like, like these: Luke 5:21, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies?" Luke 5:30, they're grumbling at him, muttering, "'Why do you eat and drink with tax

collectors and sinners?" Luke 5:33, "The disciples of John fast. So do the disciples of the Pharisees. But yours eat and drink." And as we get to Luke 6:11, they cannot contain their contempt for Jesus any longer. They are filled with, unbelievably, fury. The guy's just been healed, and they're filled with fury, and they discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Is, this is a deadly, murderous contempt for Christ among the most respected religious leaders in their culture. How can that be?

In the parallel account, Matthew 9:14, it says that "the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him." Mark tells us that their hatred drove them to conspire with some rather unlikely and unsavory characters. Mark 3:6 says, "The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." The Pharisees, the Herodians, bitter rivals, political enemies, but here they joined forces. It's almost like imagining the Democrats and the Republicans getting together, hand in hand, singing Kumbaya and Let's go kill Jesus. That's what's going on. They become co-belligerents in the common cause of murdering the Messiah. It's remarkable.

What's even more interesting, notice how God has used this opposition to teach us. Notice what comes from this opposition, as it raises some things that we would never know without it. God is bringing these very intelligent men, yet, yet hardhearted religious leaders, he's bringing them to Jesus. And as they butt up against the Son of Man, as they criticize him, as they oppose him, you know what? His true glory is being revealed. We have the privilege of seeing the manifold glory of the person and work of Jesus Christ. With every accusation, Jesus gives an apt answer.

And you know what? We learn. What we learn from this current controversy, Luke 6:1-11, it's revealed there in verse 5, "Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" That is the heart of this section of Scripture. That is a profound, an important statement of truth, which we're going to see unveiled over the next few weeks. In this controversy over the Sabbath, that's what drew out and highlighted for us the nature of Jesus Christ as Lord of the Sabbath, being the Son of Man. And this put the spotlight right on that.

Ironically, the Pharisees have always considered themselves to be the protectors of the Sabbath. Insisting on proper Sabbath day observance, in effect they have made themselves lords of the Sabbath. And now that they're face to face with the true Lord of the Sabbath, their pretension is about to be exposed completely. They are frauds. They are false lords.

So with that as a bit of background, set in the context around this section, let's work our way just a little bit into this text. We're going to start into this vital passage today, and then we're going to look at it over the next couple weeks, to see what was it that pushed these religious hypocrites over the edge.

So for this morning, point number one, you can write this down. Point number one, an unjustified accusation. An unjustified accusation. Look again at verses 1 and 2. "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?'"

We don't know how much time has passed between the banquet at Matthew's house, which was in the previous chapter, and, and then this account here. Could have been weeks, but more likely it was months that have gone by. When we compare the Gospels, we discover that between Luke 5:39 and Luke 6:1, Jesus and his disciples have actually been to Jerusalem and back. In fact, take a look at John chapter 5, John chapter 5, because that whole chapter actually happened between Luke 5:39 and Luke 6:1, and that chapter provides some very important context for the scene that is unfolding before us in Luke 6.

John 5 begins by, by telling us about another paralyzed man that Jesus healed at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Look at 5:1, chapter 5 verse 1 of, of John, and follow along as I read. "After this, there was a feast of the Jews." After what? Well, after everything that we've read from Luke, actually. After all of that, "there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool,

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in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades, and in these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed.

"One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years, and when Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be healed?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I'm going, another steps down before me.'" It's referring to a belief that the pool had healing properties, and an angel came and visited there, and would heal someone who got to the pool first. So "Jesus said to him," verse 8, "'Get up, take up your bed and walk.' And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked." Now, note this: "That day was the Sabbath."

There you have the problem. Same issue that comes up again later in Luke 6, right? Controversy over the Sabbath started in Jerusalem, in the very heart of Jewish religion, and then it followed Jesus back to Galilee.

But there's more to see here. This conflict about the Sabbath was associated with an even deeper theological controversy. Let's continue reading there. "That day was the Sabbath. And so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.' But he answered them, 'The man who healed me, that man said to me, "Take up your bed and walk.'" They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Take up your bed and walk?"'" "Not, Who is the man who healed you? That's amazing! No. Let's find out who this violator is and go after him."

"And the man who'd been healed," verse 13, "did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.' And the man went away, and he told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. This is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath."

Stop there for a second. The Pharisees, the Jewish leaders, had all kinds of rules about how much a person could carry on

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the Sabbath: how far, from what place to what place, if it was a public to a private place, or private to a public, or private-private, public-public; all these, these, uh, rules of transit and weight.

Alfred Edersheim, a Jewish convert to Christianity, he ministered in the Free Church of Scotland in the second half of the 19th century, and his life was really spent studying his own Messiah. Remarkable man. And in his magnum opus, which is called *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, big thick volume, you would love to get this and have this in your library at home: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim. He devoted a whole appendix to the Jews and their Sabbath traditions, restrictions, prohibitions.

The oral tradition about the Law of Moses is something that's called the Mishnah, and the commentary that's written about this oral tradition called the Mishnah, is called the Talmud. There's actually a Babylonian Talmud which was written in Persia. And then there's the Jerusalem Talmud, which was written, not in Jerusalem, but in Tiberius, on the Sea of

Galilee. So both were written in the second century, right after this time period. All of that oral tradition, all that commentary, it was based on what's happening right now in the days of Jesus.

And Edersheim did us the great favor of studying all of that. And he helps Christians see why these Jewish leaders appear to be nitpicking Jesus and his disciples here, as well as this poor former paralytic for carrying his bed on the Sabbath. He's been healed, but now he happens to run into some very watchful Jewish leaders. He's carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath, and he is simply obeying the one who healed him, the one who clearly has power. And if he has power, he has authority. And if he tells you, pick up your bed and walk away, you're going to do it. But he inadvertently found himself in violation of oral tradition, the Mishnah, which actually in that day, culturally, carried the weight of Mosaic law.

Here's some of the details. Since the man was in a public place, he was bearing a burden, his bedroll, he was not allowed to lift and/or carry anything heavier than the weight of a dried

fig. Yeah, you heard that right. A dr, not a fig, but a dried fig, one that has the, the moisture out of it, so it's even lighter.

Okay, so if you're not allowed to carry anything on the Sabbath heavier than a dried fig, well, it's going to discourage you from carrying your, your wares, your produce from your field to the market to buy and sell it on the Sabbath, right? Can't make too much money on anything that weighs less than a dried fig. So keep it under the weight of a dried fig; you're going to stay well within the bounds. That's what they figure. Carrying a bed? Oh, definitely heavier than dried fig. Doesn't matter that he wasn't about to sell it, doesn't matter that it wasn't, it was his own bed. Definitely heavier than a dried fig, outside the bounds, outside the regulations. Yeah, I know you've been healed from your 38-year paralysis, but put that burden down, now!

There are other regulations as well. May sound pretty strange to our ears. There were prohibitions about weaving two kinds of threads. And separating two kinds of threads. They're

also prob, not on the Sabbath, you don't do that. Making a knot or untying a knot. Sewing two kinds of stitches or tearing in order to sew two kinds of stitches. You know, you couldn't do any tailoring. You couldn't do any, textile production. You couldn't buy and sell clothing, nothing. All of that is out of bounds. I love this one: Edersheim said, quote, "A radish may be dipped into salt, but not left in it too long, since this would be to make pickle, and pickling vegetables is work." Not on the Sabbath. Okay? Dip, get a little salt just for your own palate, but don't you dare pickle anything.

One of my favorites has to do with a chicken laying an egg on the Sabbath. Yep, a chicken on the Sabbath, laying an egg; and whether or not that egg may be eaten, not just on the Sabbath, but ever. Answer? Has to do with one's intent for the chicken. Okay, here's how Edersheim describes this very important rule. He says, "On the Sabbath, only such things were to be touched or eaten, as had been expressly prepared on a weekday with a view to the Sabbath."

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So if it's prepared on the Sabbath, it's forbidden. If it's prepared on a weekday for the Sabbath, thumbs up, okay! So if a hen had laid on the Sabbath, that egg was forbidden because, evidently, it could not have been destined on a weekday for eating, since it was not yet laid and did not yet exist. While, if the hen had been kept not for laying, but for fattening (that is, to have some chicken dinner), the egg might be eaten as forming a part of the hen that had fallen off.

Okay, that's the rule. So a hen intended for laying eggs, you can't eat her Sabbath egg. But a hen intended for cooking and eating, her Sabbath egg is good to go, because that's just a part of her that's happened to have fallen off on the Sabbath. Pick it up, go ahead, cook it, eat it, Sabbath or whenever.

Okay, just a few examples there just enough to show you this whole thing had gotten slightly out of hand, okay? Rather than being the rest that God had intended, rather than being a rest for the people of God, the Sabbath had become quite the burden.

Look at John 5:15 again. "The man went away, told the Jews it was Jesus who'd healed him. And this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'" Verse 18, "This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

Did they misunderstand Jesus? No, they did not. And rather than pulling back from the controversy, Jesus actually leaned into it, here. He even seems to stoke it a bit by giving them a more provocative explanation. Hey, you're offended by my work of healing being performed on the Sabbath? Well, get this: I'm just following the lead of my Father, who's always at work. He works, so I work. You offended now?

Go back to Luke 6, Luke chapter 6. As I said, inserted between chapter 5 and chapter 6 of Luke is this whole scene in John 5: controversy about Jesus' equality with the Father. It started with a Sabbath issue; it continued with a controversy

about his identity. Theology, Christology helps us to know and understand that connected to Jesus' Sabbath-day actions are his claims of equality with God the Father. So the, the Jews were opposing him, not just for ignoring Sabbath-day traditions, but because of his reason for ignoring those social ordinances. Jesus is here claiming to be equal with God. God's working even on your Sabbath, and I'm working too.

Jesus spent the rest of John 5 explaining the nature of his relationship with the father. And beloved, that is one of the clearest passages in the whole New Testament about the relationship between God the Father and Jesus, the Messiah acting as the Son of God. So thank God for that conflict arising, right?

Some rich theology in John 5. But that's why we see the Pharisees showing up here in the grain fields. Following Jesus and his disciples around, they're now looking for an opportunity to catch him in some violation, saying something wrong. They are building a case here for destroying him, one that they can take back to the religious authorities in Jerusalem.

Now the time of year would have been after the Feast of the Jews mentioned in John 5:1. Which feast that is, exactly, it's not exactly known, but it was either the Passover in March, which would make the picking of the grain, the grain fields would make this the barley harvest or it could have been the feast of Pentecost around May, which would have made this the wheat harvest.

In any case, Jesus and his disciples, they're out there, and his disciples are hungry for a little lunch. They're not in Capernaum, which is obvious. Otherwise, they would have just headed to Levi's house and raid the fridge for leftovers. They had probably just come out of a synagogue service. They're hungry. They're walking, walking through the grain fields after gathering a few snacks. Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. They come out and like us coming out of church on a Sunday morning, what are the, what's the first thing on our mind? Right, lunch. So same thing here.

So it's, it's springtime. They're plucking heads of barley grain. If it's early summer, they're eating heads of wheat. When it says they're passing through the grain fields, here, don't picture them crashing through some poor farmer's crop. They're, they're walking on a pathway, here, between two fields, really gleaning at the edges of the fields. There's no crime in that. Deuteronomy 23:25 says it's permissible to get a little lunch like this from your neighbor's field, as long as you're not reaping that crop for profit. Says in Deuteronomy 23:25, "If you go to your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain." So just enough to satisfy the immediate need, that's all they're doing.

But out of nowhere, seemingly, in the text, some Pharisees materialize here, to challenge the disciples about this Sabbath violation. Luke's account gives us really no warning. It almost seems like the Spanish Inquisition here, popping up out of nowhere in the most inopportune moments, pointing crooked fingers of condemnation, calling everyone to give an account for transgression, for all their carefully delineated Sabbath-day stipulations and proscriptions.

"Why are you doing what is not lawful?" That verb there, it is not lawful, it's a single verb, kind of a technical word that refers to violations like this of Jewish law as explained by the scribes and the Pharisees, so Mishnah types of ordinances, what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath, that is according to their tradition, which that they had elevated to the level of Mosaic Law.

The Talmud contained a section that outlined 39 articles or kinds of labor prohibited on the Sabbath day. You might call these the 39 articles of labor. Why 39, you ask? Great question. Evidently the number 39 represents the number of times the word labor appears in the biblical text. I'm going to take their word on that. I didn't count. Very biblical, these guys. Thirty-nine, 39 prohibited activities; and they fell, those 39 activities, fell into one of four categories.

The first category, number 1-11 on the prohibition list, has to do with the preparation of bread. Number two category,

that's ordinances number 12-24, all connected with what you wear, dress, whether it has to do with stitching, sewing, tailoring, all that kind of stuff. Category number three, ver, ordinances 25-33, connected to hunting and writing. You say, Hunting and writing? Yeah, because this, the, they used to write the, the parchment that they would use to write was made out of animal skins. You couldn't hunt, skin, get rid of all the, the fur and everything and then try to, to, to, uh, tan the skin and do all the things, preparing that for writing. Number four category, ordinances 34-39, all about the work, ness, necessary within a private home. All of this was carefully described and prohibited.

I'm going to spare you the full reading of all 39 articles, but let me read you the prohibitions that are pertinent to the violation here that the disciples seem to be guilty of. These are in the first category about the preparation of food, supposedly forbidden in Scripture, and they are these: Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sifting or selecting, grinding, sifting in a sieve, kneading and baking. All prohibited. So what have the disciples done? Look at verse 1 again. "Disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing

them in their hands." Okay, so the fact that they're eating the grain, the heads of grain, well, that put them in the food prep category, right? Okay, so that's in the, clearly in category number one, they plucked the heads of grain, which is what constituted reaping, violation number one.

But their transgression went even further. They also, they also rubbed the head of grain in their hands, which, believe it or not, led to multiple transgressions, here. One action violated no less than three different prohibitions: threshing, sifting, and winnowing. So by crushing that grain between their fingers, they are threshing. By separating the edible grain from the inedible husks, they're sifting. And by throwing away the husks, they're winnowing. As Phillip Ryken put it, "With every mouthful, the disciples were violating the law four different ways." Sounds like tax code or something. We're always in violation of something federally, aren't we? Simple snack for some hungry disciples led to very serious transgressions with the, with the Pharisees. They were on hand so helpfully to point all this out. That's the tradition. That's the context of the controversy.

But what we want to understand here is what gave rise to these oral traditions in the first place, and why were the Jewish leaders so diligent and so fastidious in writing this out, carefully delineating all these 39 articles of labor in the first place? We want to spend a few minutes to look at the biblical text concerning the Sabbath, forming the basis of their traditions.

And folks, listen carefully. This is where we need to take a deep breath. We do need to reflect on what the Bible actually does say about observing the Sabbath. Because listen, as American evangelicals, living in the 21st century, we have fallen out of step with most of our brothers and sisters throughout church history who have taken the Christian Sabbath, which is what they call it, the Lord's Day, they've all taken this very seriously. We should probably listen to them. We need to think more carefully about this.

Christians for most centuries would actually come and stand in judgment on us. They'd be shocked at how we so casually profane the Lord's Day, doing pretty much whatever we want to do

on Sundays. They judge many of us evangelicals as treating the Lord's Day with contempt, as if it were just another day.

We have a Confession of Faith posted on our website. It's about 300 years old, but recent, considering the 2,000 years of church history. These seventeenth-century divines, they were no theological slouches. They said this about Sundays: "As it is the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by his Word, in a positive moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages," that is, not just the church age, but all men in all ages, "he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept wholly unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which is called the Lord's Day. It is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished."

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Next paragraph, "The Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all day, from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employment and recreations, but are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy." That confession was written by our ancestors, our Baptist forebears. And it calls the Lord's Day, a law of nature, which is in effect from the beginning of the world to the end of the world. Where do they get that?

Let's start with the most obvious passage at the very foundation of the Law of Moses. Turn back to Exodus chapter 20, verse 8. Exodus 20, verse 8. This is the fourth of the Ten Commandments. This command prescribes the observance of the Sabbath day. Exodus 20:8-11. God told Moses there, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath holy to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your livestock, the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six

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days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day," Sabbath, "and made it holy."

Pretty comprehensive, right? No work on the Sabbath, no labor. You have six days to get everything done: working to make a profit, household chores, all your shopping, laundry, running around. The seventh day is special, though. It's holy. It's a Sabbath of rest of the Lord your God. No working.

Turn a few chapters ahead to Exodus 31, Exodus 31 in verse 12. Just in case they missed the point, God reinforced the ordinance by repeating it. Exodus 31:12: "The Lord said to Moses, 'You're to speak to the people of Israel and say, "Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work upon it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

“Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore, the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a covenant forever. It's a sign forever between me and the people of Israel, that in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

That principle is repeated in Exodus 35, Leviticus 23, again in the reiteration of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5. Very clear precept. Violation results in death, and the threat of death there is repeated three times. In case they felt there was some kind of wiggle room, the Lord provides an illustration. Take a look at Numbers 15, Numbers 15, a couple books later. Numbers records the years that Israel wandered in the wilderness. They'd refused to believe and obey God, so God punished that generation.

One particular incident of Sabbath disobedience that helped Israel understand how serious God is about obeying that

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ordinance: Look at Numbers 15, verse 32. "While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. They put him in custody because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. The Lord said to Moses, 'The man should be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.' And all the congregation brought him outside the camp stoned him to death with stones, as the Lord commanded Moses."

That made the Lord's intention pretty clear, right? No working on the Sabbath, period. No working for personal gain, that is, making a little money on the side. No working for personal convenience because you failed to manage your time well enough during the week, gather those sticks before the Sabbath day started. In fact, in this case of a man gathering sticks, presumably to start a fire in his home, it was related to another law recorded in Exodus 35:3, "You shall kindle no fire in your dwelling places on the Sabbath day." A fire could burn throughout the Sabbath, but they couldn't start a new fire. Why not? Because that would tempt them to gather sticks, to chop wood, perform other work on the day of rest. So this command,

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"No kindling new fires on the Sabbath day," it kept them away from labor on the Sabbath. They had to organize all their labor during the week in such a way that the Sabbath was well-provisioned, well prepared for rest.

Two things to point out about that. First, this helps us to see how this oral tradition developed, right, originally as a help to the people to keep them from violating the Sabbath, lest they die. Problem is, they started to elevate all that Mishnah, those oral traditions, to the same level of Scripture. They meant to help people avoid violations, but they made the mistake of elevating them too high. That's what we're seeing here, as the Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples, as they write people tickets for carrying bedrolls and the like. They become self-appointed watchdogs for Sabbath-day purity.

But second thing to point out: Notice how careful and thoughtful the Jews were to be preparing for the Sabbath day. Even though all that's written about the Sabbath doesn't apply to the Lord's Day today, we have to acknowledge that, we're not putting people to death for not attending church, right? Okay,

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but still, we need to take better care to get ourselves ready. All the preparation they did, think about inwardly. How do we prepare our hearts and minds? How do we prepare our families for treating the Lord's Day as holy.

Honoring the Lord's Day, it has not been abrogated by the New Testament, as Jesus said in Luke 6:5. What did he say? "The Son of Man is," and we might add, remains, "Lord of the Sabbath." He is its Lord. It's not import, unimportant to our Lord how we treat the Lord's Day, is it? Principle goes all the way back to Genesis, as you hear, all the way back to the end of the Creation week. Six days of creation activity are capped off by the seventh day, marking the end of God's creative work, memorializing it by calling it a day of rest. Genesis 2:2-3: "On the seventh day, God finished the work that He'd done. He rested on the seventh day from all his work he had done. So God blessed the seventh day. He made it holy because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation." Six days of labor, one day of rest sets the pattern for our week that we still observe.

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So by principle in Genesis, and example, by precept in Exodus and Deuteronomy, by illustration in Numbers, the Sabbath day is to be treated as holy. The Lord's Day is to be set apart from the normal activities of all the other days, and the practice of Israel, it's patterned on the creation week, which is the way that God intended for all humanity to live.

God intended human beings to enjoy rest from their labors. He's concerned about your rest and my rest, and that's why it's a day that was not just holy to the Lord, Exodus 31:14 says, "It's holy to you," for you for your benefits. Work diligently for six days, do pretty much whatever you want to do on those days, as long as it's not in violation of the law. But on the seventh, rest in devotion to your God. So for the Jews, that's Saturday, the literal Sabbath. But for Christians, that's Sunday, the Lord's Day, which is the first day of the week, the day on which God said, "'Let there be light,' and there was light." We observe the Lord's Day.

All of humanity, folks, has been guilty of violating the Lord's Day. All those people out there that are treating this

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day like any other day, they're, they're not treating it as holy. They're not living according to the pattern set forth in Creation. Many continue to use the day to make a profit, or more commonly today in our country, to use the day to indulge in pleasure and recreation, ignoring completely their responsibility to worship God as holy. We don't have time now to cover this, but jot down in your notes Jeremiah 17:19 and following, Jeremiah 17:19, just keep reading. And then Isaiah 58:13-14.

Because Israel, God's people, they were guilty of this, too. They used the Sabbath to make money, Jeremiah 17. They used the Sabbath to indulge their own pleasures, Isaiah 58. And God called the nation to repent of, quote, "Doing your pleasure on my holy day and going their own ways, seeking their own pleasure, and," get this, "talking idly." He called them to obey. He called them to call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable. And if they would do that, he would bless them. "I will make you ride on the heights of the earth. I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Listen, we laugh and poke fun a bit at those 39 prohibitions for the Sabbath, and that's understandable. It did go too far, but not for them. We, we need to appreciate where those regulations came from to understand why this was such a heightened controversy for Jesus and his disciples, why the scribes and Pharisees took all this so seriously.

Go ahead and turn back to Luke 6. We're just going to wrap up here. Assuming the best about the motives of the people who wrote the Mishnah and came out with the oral tradition, they're writing out those regulations to set boundaries for people. And it started out as a desire to seek God's blessing. In fact, notice Jesus' response to their accusation. He actually doesn't, here, quibble with them about whether or not the disciples' behavior constituted a violation of the Law. We're going to get to that next week. In some circumstances, yeah, but there were extenuating circumstances he intended to show them, here.

And that's point two in our outline. Write this down. Point one was about an unjustified accusation. We're going to see that more clearly in point two as we develop it next week. But he

gives them an unparalleled illustration. An unparalleled illustration. That's point two. Take a look at verse 3. Just time to introduce this. "Jesus answered them, '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 he also gave it to those with him.' He said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'"

For the moment, I just want you to see the nature of his response. He asked them, "Have you not read?" He's not suggesting they haven't been reading their Bibles. He knows they've been reading their Bibles. This is why he just summarized this salient portion of the account that they're familiar with. I just want you to notice he made the argument saying, "Have you not read?" This is a question that goes directly to the issue of authority, and the only standard that has a legitimate claim on the consciences of men and women. The fundamental issue in this controversy is that only Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath, only he has the right to interpret God's Word on the Sabbath. Only he has the right to command the consciences of men and women.

Pharisees, they had elevated all their interpretations, traditions, prescriptions, proscriptions. They put it on par with Scripture, and they made things like circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, according to their rules. They made that the mark of Jewish identity, Jewish fidelity to God. And even though these Pharisees had attacked the disciples, challenging them, Jesus stepped in to break the chains of all that tradition which held Israel in bondage.

Listen, beloved, I know your conscience like mine, has been pricked a little bit this morning by failure to honor the Lord's Day. We've all done that. We've all been guilty of it. We're thankful that we have the Lord Jesus Christ who's forgiven us of all sin, including these sins we not, are not even aware of sometimes. But listen, no one but Jesus Christ can command your conscience about how to treat the Lord's Day as holy. What about church authority? Our job is to teach, to inform your conscience about what God's Word does and does not say. I mean, if you're neglecting the Lord's Day altogether, we need to talk about that.

But church leadership has to be very careful not to assert opinions, personal preferences, scruples of conscience, and bind the consciences of God's people, because that's exactly what these Pharisees, these scribes, were doing to their people. That's why our elders have very wisely added a qualifying statement, just to make it clear, under our statement on the Confession that's posted on our website about the Lord's Day.

Here's what it says, "The elders affirm the 'one day in seven' principle as a holy day of devotion to and refreshment in God. This is the Lord's Day, Sunday, which has replaced the Old Testament Sabbath, Saturday, and is holy to the Lord. The elders do not believe the Law of Moses governs the Lord's Day. While the regular attendance to the Lord's Day worship is required (Hebrews 10:24-25), the elders do not intend to bind the saints in matters of conscience (Colossians 2), or necessity, like military and law enforcement, emergency services." It is never going to be our intention as elders, as church leadership, to act like those Pharisees, to shadow your every move so we can adjudicate on matters of conscience. Holiness is first and foremost a matter of the heart, but it does show up in how you

manage your work and recreation throughout the week, how you treat the Lord's Day.

But Paul says very clearly, Colossians 2:16-17, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come. Substance belongs to Christ." "Belongs to Christ." Holiness, ultimately, is a matter of the heart. None of us elders want to find ourselves in the foolish position of butting heads, like these Pharisees did, with the Lord of the Sabbath.