

[read Luke 6:1-5] Well the Sabbath Day was always a point of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees and the other Jewish authorities. This was because by Jesus' time, they had extended the original scriptural idea of the Sabbath as a day of rest on which you didn't work and gave time to worship the Lord. The Pharisees had made it legal and detailed, instead of a simple commonsense idea of the Sabbath they had 39 categories of actions that were forbidden on the Sabbath – more rules surrounded the Sabbath than any other commandment. This was a process that had greatly intensified after the exile, probably because the Jews were struggling to maintain a Jewish identity.

But whilst setting up all these detailed rules the Pharisees became expert at finding loophole sin them, so it was predictable that the Sabbath would be an area of conflict with Jesus.

Even how far Jesus and the disciples walked could have been an area of conflict because the Pharisees ruled that you couldn't walk more than 2,000 paces on the Sabbath.

The Bible records six conflicts between the Jews and Jesus over the Sabbath and this is the only one that doesn't involve healing on the Sabbath.

You weren't allowed to harvest on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21), but just plucking a few ears of grain to eat wasn't harvesting. Jesus tells the Pharisees that human need overrides the law, even the Sabbath Law, and that they don't understand the true meaning of scripture. What's more, as Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus had the authority to change their understanding of the Sabbath.

But the Pharisees just continued to escalate the conflict with Jesus [read 6:6-11]. The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus but Jesus doesn't draw back from the confrontation, he never did. The Pharisees might well have planted the man with the shrivelled hand to see if Jesus would heal him. They weren't interested in his well being they just wanted to have an excuse to accuse Jesus. Healing in their eyes was work, and since the man's life wasn't threatened it was forbidden on the Sabbath.

Jesus was well aware of their scheming, but he healed the man anyway, because our God desires mercy not legalism. We can see the foundation for verse 9 in Hosea 6:6:
“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”
(Ho 6:6 NIV)

What were the Pharisees complaining about anyway, Jesus didn't even touch the man let alone do anything, he just spoke to him. How could that be work? The Pharisees were so concerned not to do evil they had forgotten the need to do good. Jesus emphasises mercy and compassion as being at the heart of the Sabbath Law.

Jesus intentionally brings his conflict with the Pharisees to a head. The man didn't ask to be healed but Jesus uses his healing as an object lesson. The Pharisees had actually demeaned the Sabbath by robbing it of its rest and burdening it with onerous religious requirements. This is what Jesus meant when he said “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Mercy was supposed to be at the heart of the Sabbath Law and Jesus' actions were consistent with this.

But, the Pharisees were blinded by their devotion to legalistic interpretations of the Law. Concerned as they were for keeping all the details of the Sabbath Law, they amazingly see no problem in plotting to kill Jesus on the Sabbath – look at verse 11:

“But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.”
(Luke 6:11 NIV)

For us today we need to keep the Sabbath as a day when we rest and honour God, but we’re not to be legalistic about it. Legalism makes us narrow, but we need to accept God’s grace and mercy. We can’t defeat sin through our own efforts or through legalism, we need to depend on God’s grace.

Then after confirming the appointment of the 12 disciples, Jesus launches into what’s often called the “Sermon on a Level Place” a parallel to Matthew’s famous “Sermon on the Mount” (actually I think this is the same thing, it was just a flat place on the side of the mountain).
[Read Luke 6:17-38]

These are a blessing on those who already have faith – favoured is a better translation of the Greek *Makarioi* than blessed or happy.

V20 is speaking of those who are spiritually poor – as we all are – but who acknowledge this and know their need of God. It’s not an economic status but a religious character.

V21 speaks of spiritual hunger

Weeping speaks of oppression now and they will receive God’s joy

V22 probably thinking of Jewish Christians put out of the synagogue. We’re blessed when we are oppressed because of our faith in Christ.

V23 because we stand in good company with the prophets

V24-26 unlike Matthew Luke has a list of woes. These parallel the blessings