

## HARD HEARTS or SOFT HEARTS

Luke 6:1-11

I want to note in a few weeks' time take two weeks to look at 1 Cor. 12 and talk about spiritual gifts, highlight the call for us to be serving in the church, using the gifts God has given us

But as we come to today's passage I want us to be aware that including the passage from last Sunday - that is 5:33-6:11 – Luke provides a series of 3 controversies. The first was regarding fasting (lunisi...) the next two are regarding the Sabbath.

As Luke describes these scenes (also in Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6) they give us an insight into the kinds of opposition Jesus faced, and how he responds to that opposition. That is to say whilst the main theme of this passage is Jesus dealing with Sabbath matters, it is simply the means through which Jesus establishes the truth, namely that he is the Lord not only of Sabbath, but of all. The Sabbath is also a means through which we see the difference between Jesus' heart and the Pharisees hearts. It is diagnostic, of whether our hearts are soft (new wine skins) or hard (...old wine skins).

What we are about to read is Jesus addressing the state of hearts. Therefore, will address the state of our hearts.... (*table*)

(READ) 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. <sup>2</sup> Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." <sup>6</sup> On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shrivelled. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. <sup>9</sup> 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?" <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

We're only at ch.6. in Luke but already we're seeing a groundswell of opposition to Jesus. And that opposition is primarily from the Jewish leaders, who at this point in Jesus' ministry viewed him as their biggest threat. And he was! Eventually that opposition took Jesus to the cross.

We've just read in v.11 that Jesus infuriated the religious order. Why? Because Jesus took every opportunity to break down the foundations of *their version of truth* and what was ungodly religion and ritual. Right here is the relevancy of today's passage. Truth. We must be reminded in this day of truth being relative, it is not, relative. *Are you confused?* There is only Christ's truth...The Pharisees \*represent the kind of opposition to truth in the world today, but not just the world, the church as well.

*Who is truth?* Jesus. *What is truth?* What he says.

And you'll recall from looking at the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3 controversies last week Jesus' message was the gospel of the new wine (truth) can't be put it into the old wineskins of Judaism (error). There cannot be a mixing of truth and error. The good news of faith, grace and repentance is incompatible with a religion of pride, self-righteousness, and works. The religious were not having a bar of it, would not listen or accept the truth, their hearts were hard.

With the Pharisees now having a higher profile in Luke it's helpful to be reminded of who they are and what they did.

God had originally given 613 laws to Moses – called "Torah" – to govern and guide ancient Israel.

The Mishnah is an oral tradition of commentary on this Law that added, man-made rules sort of ring-fencing Moses' Law to prevent people from breaking God's commandments.

The Pharisees concern was keeping these man-made rules, most importantly having the outward appearance of keeping them, but having little regard for any change of heart or the *spirit* of the law.

We cannot think that this – adding... - is peculiar to just these folk back then. Because it what we do when we add, alter, change, misinterpret to suit...

In very simple terms they had taken something that God had meant for good and shaped it into something that served their own religious purposes.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst Jesus had compassion and grace for sinners, let me remind you of what he thought of the Pharisees and Co...

E.g. Matt. 23:27, 28 *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: [The Rules of the Pharisees - pursueGOD.org](http://The Rules of the Pharisees - pursueGOD.org)

<sup>2</sup> This is the definition of the legalist

Jesus opposed them because their teachings were a deviation from the truth and they offered people the lie that when you do certain things God is pleased with you when he's not. And in today's verses that is Sabbath observance.<sup>3</sup>

## Jesus' Response to Untruths

(refer Vv.1-2) On this particular day, probably not giving too much thought to what they were doing, the disciples will have been walking through a grain field, reaching out a hand, as they're walking along, grabbing heads of grain, rubbing them between their hands so they could eat the kernels. Much in the same way you'd walk through nana's garden and pull the pods of peas off the trellis...

Now taking the grain wasn't the issue here. Deut. 23:25<sup>4</sup>...it was customary in Israel for a portion of the land to be left for the needy. The issue was that it was the **Sabbath....**

Gen. 2:2, 3 *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

NB: God didn't rest because he needed to, but because he chose to.

Ex. 20:9, 10 *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work..."*

If we look at the parallel passage in Mark 2:27 he adds Jesus saying *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"* meaning God intended for all humanity to rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. Therefore, Sabbath law was/is take a day of rest, *because God did*

Jews took the Sabbath very seriously. How Serious? In Jewish tradition (Talmud) there are 24 chapters of Sabbath laws<sup>5</sup> with 39 forbidden commands with what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath as it is observed sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

I read last week that one rabbi spent 2 ½ years studying one of those 24 chapters trying to figure it out.

Here's one example: the "law" forbade you from carrying anything on you that weighed more than a *dried fig*. There's goes your eftpos/credit card! But you were allowed to carry half a fig on two occasions on the Sabbath. The law forbade you from leaving a radish in your salt because that would make pickle, nor were you allowed to put on false teeth: btw, your salvation depended on this.<sup>6</sup> And it had become more and more complex through reinterpretation of it.

Sabbath was simply the command God gave to cease work and have a rest.

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<sup>3</sup> You get this right, then you're right with God.

<sup>4</sup> If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.

<sup>5</sup> Ancient Jewish rule book

<sup>6</sup> [Jesus: The Divine Truth-Teller \(gtv.org\)](http://Jesus:TheDivineTruth-Teller(gtv.org))

Vv.1-2 Obviously the Pharisees were right there, lurking, keeping a close eye on Jesus and his disciples... and as the Pharisees flicked through their little book they asked (*rhet.*)/ask: "ooiii!" *"Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"*

The disciples weren't in there with the truck taking the lot, but were guilty of "breaking" at least 4 of the 39 forbidden commands: reaping, threshing, winnowing and preparing. The question the Pharisees were really asking was *"why are you breaking our law and challenging our religion"?*

<sup>3</sup> *Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup> 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."*

Now we know the Pharisees are well trained, learned, steeped-in-the-scriptures men, so we can probably appreciate how irritating it would be for Jesus to say *"Have you never read..."* referring specifically to 1 Sam. 21:1-7; 22:8-9.

Jesus knows they've got it memorised, they know what Jesus is referring to, but Jesus' point is you've read it, but you've misinterpreted it.

Why would Jesus use the example of David? David, most likely on the Sabbath, took the bread set aside for the priests from the tabernacle to feed his men (see Ex. 25; Lev. 24; 1 Sam. 21). Read 1 Sam. 21:6 you'll see the priest willingly gave David and his men the bread. Meaning what? For the Pharisees to challenge Jesus and the disciples here means to disagree with what David did.

Jesus' point was no ceremonial law must stand in the way of providing for the essential needs of life. Such being food for the hungry and healing for the sick.

We don't know what Jesus' tone was, I've no doubt he's being gracious and compassionate, but the truth is the Pharisees are in error. Notice Jesus doesn't apologise, *"I'm really sorry if I've offended you. Let's get-together over a coffee, I'm sure we can work something out"*. No, how does he treat the Sabbath? Any way he wants! (v.5) *"I'm the Lord of the Sabbath"*

What Jesus is doing here is a big deal, messing with something very precious to the Pharisees. Let me remind you God had given the law, instituted to govern and guide the people of God. This group took it and reinterpreted as something way beyond Gods truth. And Jesus is opposing their religion, a re-branded version of Gods truth. And he is right to do so because he was there when the law was set down, he should know!

The law was never intended to prevent people from eating or from helping people in need. Sabbath law was a freeing thing, not a binding thing. It was intended to free people up to rest and enjoy God, not to prevent or prohibit the serving of others or basic needs being met, or compassion toward others.

However, the hard, accusatory, thinking the worst of everyone, legalistic, hearts of the Pharisees couldn't see or receive this truth. When *Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath"*, this was a rebuke to their religiousness, their version of truth...and you're not getting away with it Jesus would say. *"I'm the Lord of the Sabbath"*, the law is interpreted through me now, I've provided the guidelines. Guidelines we gratefully abide in as we follow and worship Jesus.

*We don't worship the rule; we worship the person Jesus, God is obeyed, not through rules, but as we follow Jesus.*

Let's go now to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the two controversies regarding Sabbath.

### **Jesus' Response to Hard Hearts**

*<sup>6</sup> On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shrivelled. <sup>7</sup> 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.*

So as v.6 says this is *"on another Sabbath"*. As well as being the Sabbath they are in the Synagogue...place of worship, where Jesus chooses to do his next miracle, look out! And a man is there with a *"shrivelled"* right hand.

Now this is significant because in Jewish thinking, one of the many extra-biblical rules are if it is the Sabbath, unless it is a life and death situation, a person must wait for treatment. *No matter how serious...CPR...*

The Pharisees are there, "in church", they're already suspicious of Jesus, and they're ready to pick the eyes out of anything that Jesus says or does and if necessary they'll tell him straight after where his theology is skewwhiff!

In fact the word *"watched"* in v.7 there actually means *"to watch out the corner of the eye"*<sup>7</sup>.

Btw this is typical of Pharisees, always suspicious, always negative, always seeing the negative in things – sound like fun people to be around right!

Jesus is aware of where he is, knows what day it is, knows what they're thinking (v.8)...and he knows they're looking for any reason to accuse him, despite that he has the man stand up, in front of everyone. So we've gone from don't tell anyone, to like the mainstage!

*<sup>9</sup> 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?"*

Can we see the irony in Jesus' question? The Pharisees would be looking up in their little books and say no way is that lawful. But in Jesus' question he is implying that it is

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<sup>7</sup> NIV Luke Comms, 178

unlawful not to help this man. He's saying that may be your kind of Sabbath but my Sabbath is where people are fed and people are shown compassion.

Mercy rules, rules. Jesus is saying a failure to meet this man's needs would be evil.

I read about a 15-year-old boy was severely wounded in the crossfire of a Chicago gang fight. His friends carried him to the ER of the closest hospital, setting him down 15metres from the ER door, then went inside to ask for help. The hospital employees said, *"it's against the rules to give medical treatment to anyone outside the door."* While they argued about the rules, the 15-year-old bled to death.

Jesus was asking the same question: *"which is the higher priority - to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"* The hospital then changed its rules, not that the old rule was bad. Patients should still be brought in rather than doctors going out. But, when it comes down to it, always do what is good and right.<sup>8</sup>

That's the answer to Jesus' question in v.9. And they knew that. How do we know? We can be very certain they'd read and could probably recite Isa. 1.

*Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me.*

*New Moons, Sabbaths...— I cannot bear your worthless assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening.*<sup>9</sup>

What is God saying? Stop your religious nonsense, superficial sacrifices and your shallow false religion. Same kind of thing that Jesus is addressing here in Luke. Stop that stuff, clean your heart out, do good, help people and show compassion and mercy.<sup>10</sup> Here is the "law of love" at work.

<sup>10</sup> *He looked around at them all – little like he did with the woman caught in adultery - and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored.*

So here's the man, centre stage, everyone's watching now. He's probably thinking surely he's not going to...? The man was healed, completely restored. This was a man with a shrivelled hand. It could just well be a shrivelled, hard heart. And Jesus says, you stretch out your heart and I can restore it. You say I can't. Jesus didn't ask the man to do something he could do, *the miracle happened as he stretched out...*

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.higherpraise.com/outlines/woodvale/luke16.htm>

<sup>9</sup> An important accompanying text is Mark 7:6, 7 Jesus is quoting Isaiah, *"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.*

<sup>10</sup> My mind goes to Jesus' prayer in the Lazarus situation: *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."* (John 11:40, 42)

Jesus could have waited till after the Sabbath to avoid the reaction of the Pharisees, but he's the Lord of the Sabbath!

So here's this guy, high-fiving everyone with his new hand and what was the reaction of the Pharisees?

<sup>11</sup>...*(they) were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.*

If you want a definition of what legalism is, this is how legalists react.<sup>11</sup> Furious! They weren't jumping out of their skin rejoicing the man was healed, blinded to the good thing Jesus had done. In fact, more accurately (GK) they were filled with mindless, irrational, rage. Polar opposite to the fruit of the spirit in Gal. 5.

So deep were the roots of religion and rules buried within them, *their hearts* were hardened to what God had just done in front of their eyes and the truth of Jesus.

**And that, is what religion does, it hardens hearts.**

We don't follow the religion of God, or the religion of Jesus, we follow the person of Jesus.

As we consider our own Christian walks in light of this passage – *table* – it is that we do so looking at **the difference of heart between Jesus, and the Pharisees**. The difference is misery and mean-spirited, as opposed to joy and freedom of the Spirit. The topic of Sabbath was simply the means of diagnosing the state of their hearts.

As I think about these 2 examples Luke has given us I want to suggest the worst thing we can do is think, that's not me, or that will never be me, man I can totally see how that other person is doing that. No, this is about each of us searching our own hearts before God this morning, as *"he looks around at us, and knows what we're thinking"*

And as he does, does he see any resemblance to the Pharisees as they accused the disciples *"that's not lawful"* Or does he see us being mean-spirited when God is doing good things.<sup>12</sup>

When Jesus' truth stares us in the face, we can apply it or ignore it. We can be quick to point the finger and criticize others for their wrong doing, when all along the bigger issue is with ourselves, and we refuse to see that, because it's a lot harder to admit that and have a soft heart, a lot easier to blame others. Why Jesus had great difficulty getting through to these guys.

It would be unthinkable that Jesus would hold a grudge against us and therefore prevent us from having relationship with him. He doesn't do that, but we do.

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<sup>11</sup> This is as pure a definition we get from scripture on the 'fruit' of a legalistic mind-set

<sup>12</sup> Blinded by our own self-righteousness and slow to offer mercy.

Jesus readily gives us his mercy. So do we, without hesitation, unless we misinterpret the word of God.

Rom. 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*

Following Christ is following his heart and following his heart means mercy and grace, it is about our internal character and a right heart before God. It is taking his word and owning it, not taking his word and making it my own. Following Christ in not keeping up appearances it is a much higher calling. We can do all that and be a long way from God on the inside. Our hearts can be "*far from him*".

To live as a Christian means to guard our hearts from going down the sorts of legalistic rabbit holes we see in the Pharisees and T.O.L. It helps us, to *listen* to how Jesus responded to them

Prov. 4:23 *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

Guarding our hearts means that we readily do what Jesus has asked us to do and we stop doing the things we know are not part of following his heart.

Heb. 4:16 *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Why do we keep coming back to God? To grow in grace, to be accepting and understanding of God's grace, is also to have the courage to admit our sin, confess our sin, and appreciate how much we need Christ every day.<sup>13</sup>

*Who is truth?* Jesus. *What is truth?* What he says.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition-org.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/when-sin-is-grievous-and-grace-is-stunning/?amp>