

Lord of the Sabbath  
Luke 5:33 - 6:11  
March 7, 2021  
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CenterPoint Church

Read Luke 5:33 - 6:11

*"(Jesus) said, 'Blessed (rather) are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"* (Luke 11:28)

## **Introduction**

The first time I ever went to a wine tasting, the guy who was putting it on gave us notepads to write down our reactions to each wine that we tasted. He was an amateur connoisseur who loved to try different wines, he probably had a subscription to *Wine Spectator* magazine, and loved to visit different vineyards around northern Virginia to sample their wines. For me, if it's red and hasn't gone sour, it's probably fine. I've probably told you before that I have no sense of smell, so when real wine lovers smell their wine first, that doesn't help me at all. And not having a sense of smell affects my taste buds as well, I don't taste a lot of the varieties. But I wanted to get into the spirit of the wine tasting, so I wrote some things down: "This wine tasted good. I liked how smooth it went down." Then I started making up things: "The pomegranate notes hide behind the rich mocha flavors, but reward the palette in the aftertaste." I even borrowed my father-in-law's classic phrase that he uses every time he tries a wine (everybody in his family can recite this): "It's a modest wine lacking in breeding, but I'm amused by its impertinence." Anyways, I got through the tasting and my friend thought I was an idiot, which I am.

The people in Jesus' day were much more familiar with the ins and outs of wine than I was. They knew the good stuff, they knew how to preserve and store wine, it was a much more common part of their meal than it is today, plus it was often a healthier alternative to dirty water. So for Jesus to use wine as a spiritual object lesson connected with His audience. The text is much bigger than that image, though, as we will deal with questions of Sabbath keeping and breaking as well.

We've got a lot jammed in here, so you'll have to listen quickly. The first point is

### **I. Feasting with the Bridegroom (5:33-39)**

*<sup>33</sup> And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? <sup>35</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days." <sup>36</sup> He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. <sup>37</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. <sup>38</sup> But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. <sup>39</sup> And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'"*

In last week's passage the Pharisees had criticized Jesus for who He was eating with. In this passage they're criticizing His disciples for eating and drinking at all! It's not so much that they wanted them to starve, but that the Pharisees wanted His disciples to follow their traditions and their rules, which was fasting often. They had such a narrow view of what was acceptable and what wasn't. They expected everyone who wanted to be considered godly and religiously obedient to fast twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, when the only Biblical requirement for fasting was once a year

on the Day of Atonement.<sup>1</sup> “So come on, Jesus, your disciples should be showing their piety by fasting like us!” Jesus’ answer came in the form of framing this idea of fasting in the much larger context of His Lordship and His ministry, and He used three images to explain Himself.

Jesus didn’t forbid fasting, He just encouraged His followers to do it with the right attitude and at appropriate times. In Matthew 6:16-18, he said that you shouldn’t be like the Pharisees and disfigure your face to draw attention to yourself and impress people. We’ve already studied His 40 day fast in the wilderness, which was preparation for His ministry. That was an appropriate time to fast. A wedding is not an appropriate time to fast. Who wants to refrain from eating and drinking and joining in on all the celebrating of a wedding party? That is the time for joy, feasting, and dancing, not somber discipline.

The Pharisees probably were confused by what Jesus said, but they assumed He was just giving a word picture of a wedding feast with a hypothetical groom and guests. They probably didn’t realize that Jesus was calling Himself the bridegroom. And maybe we wouldn’t realize that either if there weren’t other places in the New Testament where we are told that Jesus is the groom and the church is His bride. Ephesians 5:25-27 is talking about marriage and tells husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church. Paul establishes a parallel in a marriage to Christ and His bride, the church. Then the great picture of Jesus’ wedding, His being united with His bride at the end of time is in Revelation 19:7 – *“Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready.”*

Since we understand that truth now, we can see what Jesus is saying: “My disciples don’t need to act mournful and fast while I’m here. Salvation is among them, it is a time to celebrate and see the work of God in action. When I’m gone, then they can think about fasting.” What is the most appropriate response to knowing and being with Jesus? Joy! To discover who Jesus is and to receive Him as Lord and Savior is to find your greatest happiness.

The disciples were part of the new covenant, the new way of thinking, so Jesus went on to describe that further in verses 36-39 by talking about clothing and wineskins. What Jesus is essentially saying is that His new way, which would become Christianity, is not simply a patch on Judaism, He didn’t come to simply reform or slightly alter Judaism. As Jesus and all of His disciples and most of His early followers were Jewish, and the new way would grow out of Judaism, it was very difficult to understand how Christianity and Judaism would interact. The new way would be so rooted in the old, the new Scriptures would constantly be quoting the old, the life of Jesus was attested to throughout the Old Testament, it’s not a brand-new religion starting from scratch. But neither is it just a new branch of Judaism. It’s a totally new covenant community, built on the foundation of the old covenant. But ultimately, to mix the new and living kingdom of God with the obsolete Jewish legal and ceremonial system would be as self-defeating as trying to sew a piece from a new garment onto an old garment. It destroys the new and doesn’t help the old. And conversely, the new wine into old wineskins will destroy the old skins and not help the new wine. There need to be appropriate vessels for the new elements. You can’t just sprinkle a little Gospel on top of the law and legalism.

Now I’ve heard people use these verses to justify all kinds of things: “we need new ways of doing church, of reaching people because the old wineskins are not working.” I think that we’re on much safer grounds when we see these verses as teaching the difference between the Old Testament and

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know The Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 196.

the New Testament, and how God deals with His people before and after Jesus. Some examples of new garments or new wineskins:

1) The most important thing was that Jesus' death would be the sacrifice that took the place of the need for God's people to sacrifice animals to atone for their guilt; the sacrificial system of the Old Testament was gone for good, and faith in Christ was the new way to made right with God.

2) Clean and unclean foods would no longer be an issue, as God revealed that all food is clean.

3) The insider/outsider mentality had to go. Throughout the OT, God's people had to protect their identity and keep their religion pure from the pagan nations outside of it; they struggled with this, they ended up worshipping foreign idols and gods. So in trying to return to fidelity to God, the religious leaders had decided that all outsiders and all non-Jews were to be avoided. But the new wineskins would involve ministering to all kinds of people, all nations. God's people would not just be ethnic Jews and those who conformed to their ways, but expanded to all people groups, all tribes, all tongues who united under faith in Jesus Christ.

4) The Sabbath is now on Sunday because that was the day that Jesus rose from the dead and that the early church moved its worship to.

Jesus' final statement in verse 39 about people preferring old wine is just the truth that the Pharisees will reject His new wine and new ways. They felt that they had found the perfect way to please God and live the respected Jewish life according to their laws, so it doesn't matter how many lepers this guy heals, how many demons He cast out, or how many times He claimed to be the Son of God the Father. They were not going to consider changing.

The second story is another criticism of the disciples; this time about how they didn't keep the Sabbath correctly.

## **II. Eating with the Lord of the Sabbath (6:1-5)**

*<sup>1</sup> On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. <sup>2</sup> But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" <sup>3</sup> And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>4</sup> 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?" <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."*

When the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of violating the law, were they pointing to somewhere in the Old Testament where it says that it is forbidden to pick grain and eat it on the Sabbath? No! They were pointing to their book of laws that had been developed on top of what was Biblical – it was called the Mishnah – and that law said that to rub grain together to eat was work, so this was a violation of a law they had made up. Jesus referred to a story from King David's life to make His point. Essentially, if David could violate the ceremonial law to provide for his men who were hungry with the bread that was normally set aside for the priests, how much more would the new David, the greater King of Israel, Jesus, allow His disciples to pick grain and eat it? Especially since that wasn't a violation of any true law?

Mark 2:27 inserts a phrase that Luke does not record in his version of this story: "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" That should help orient and guide us to the Sabbath's true purpose: that it is meant to be helpful for people. That resting from your work is not a punishment, but a blessing. And we should not feel like slaves to Sabbath restrictions that others impose on us. But it's easy to want to take that line and say, "see, I can do whatever I want on the Sabbath, because the Sabbath serves me, not the other way around." But not so fast, because the closing line in both

Mark's and Luke's account is, "*The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.*" So, greater than the idea that the Sabbath serves you is the idea that it is under the direction of Jesus. He is the source and author of all the law and designed the Sabbath to honor Himself. So, the proper way to figure out how to observe the Sabbath is not to say, "What do I want the Sabbath to look like?" but to ask, "How does Jesus want me to observe the Sabbath?"

The first two stories have been about criticism of the disciples, but this last story is a criticism of Jesus Himself.

### **III. Healing with the Lord of the Sabbath (6:6-11)**

*<sup>6</sup> On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come and stand here." And he rose and stood there. <sup>9</sup> 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?" <sup>10</sup> And after looking around at them all he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored. <sup>11</sup> But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.*

Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking, that they were looking for things to be angry about and to accuse Him of doing. They were actually hoping that He would heal this man so they could nail Him with one more way that He didn't keep the law right. He's already failed them by eating with the wrong people, with not requiring His disciples to fast or refrain from picking grain on the Sabbath. Now He would have the nerve to do a work of healing? Again, this was not a situation where there was an Old Testament law forbidding healing on the Sabbath, this was another added law that the Pharisees felt they had to enforce: healing to them was a work that should be avoided because, well, rules are rules, and who cares about people?

Michael Kruger calls verse 9 "the world's easiest theological question": "*is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?*" In most contexts, we would call that a "no brainer," a "softball question." To do good and to save life would be honoring God. But that was tricky for the Pharisees, they had boxed themselves in. If they answered "to do good," then they would be giving Jesus the green light to heal the man. Not only would this prove that their man-made laws were a farce, but it would rob them of their opportunity to "accuse" Jesus. If the Pharisees answered, "to do harm," then they would be directly admitting that they were advocates for bad behavior. So, trapped between these two options, they chose to say nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus didn't have to heal this man. He could have avoided the friction of this whole incident by just telling the man to come back tomorrow and He'd heal Him. But Jesus clearly needed to make a point that His love and mercy trump man-made laws. And really, what better day to witness and celebrate God healing someone than on the Sabbath, the Lord's Day? How ridiculous to want to limit God's power and work on the special day set aside to worship and celebrate Him. And what a great reminder that love is greater than man-made laws. If you have a choice between following some rule that a fellow Christian has made up and doing an act of love and mercy, I hope you won't hesitate to show love. Sacrificial love never breaks the law, as Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:8, 10 instruct us: "*For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' 'Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.'*"

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.michaelkruger.com/the-worlds-easiest-theological-question/>

What does verse 11 say was the final response to this incident? The Pharisees were filled with rage and began to plot about what to do to Jesus. In other words, they just saw Jesus restoring life on the Sabbath, so they looked to plot His death on that same Sabbath!<sup>3</sup> How ironic that to them it was not OK to give life, but to plot to take life was fine.

### **Conclusion:**

I want to drill down in one area of application: If you have been a Christian for a while, especially if you've been one for a long time, be very careful about imposing your personal standards and the ways that you live in obedience to God on everyone. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad that you walk in obedience to the Lord and have instituted disciplines and have decided how you will act in different areas, different situations. But these passages speak against using your personal religious example as a requirement for all other Christians to obey. Of course, I'm not talking about things that violate the Commandments and the clear teaching of Scripture. We should not be shy about telling people that God does not want them to murder or commit adultery, things that are pretty clear from Scripture. But it's very easy to impose the way we do things that are more about our preferences or how we've decided to live in different areas where there is actually freedom and discernment.

The classic text on Christian freedom/liberty is found in Romans 14:1-6, 10-12, please turn there: *"<sup>1</sup> As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. <sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God... <sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." <sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."* Obviously, we could have a full sermon on that passage, but I just want us to see that Paul is saying that each Christian answers to God alone, and we each have to be convinced in our own minds how best to obey Him in the specifics of our walk. Verse 4 – *"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?"*

Let's think through a few examples:

1) Let's hit a big one first: alcohol. Some Christians are convinced it is ungodly to drink any alcohol, since the Scriptures forbid getting drunk. Someone who has abused alcohol or grown up with alcoholic parents may very well decide to never touch a drop of alcohol. That's great, but to impose that on every other Christian and tell them they're sinning if they have a glass of wine or a nice Scotch over dinner would be a very Pharisaical way of seeing things. (I'm, of course, not talking about drinking by minors – obey the law of the land and don't drink any alcohol before you're 21 years old. And drinking must never reach the stage of intoxication, that is clearly forbidden by Scripture.) But the rule of Christian freedom we just read says there is latitude for those of us who are adults and believe we can handle drinking. There is an opposite pressure that I see in PCA circles sometimes to expect everyone to drink alcohol and to tell them they're uptight legalists if they don't. That's not a good way to allow others their Christian liberty either.

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<sup>3</sup> Suggested by Michael Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), p. 85.

2) We've been talking about the Sabbath and that's an important area of Christian freedom. The fourth commandment does not spell out exactly how we are to keep the Sabbath, other than resting from labor and keeping it holy. There are some Christians and churches who take this to mean we must worship most of the day. There are Christians who will never eat out or do any shopping or errands that involve money on Sundays because they don't want to force anyone else to work on the Sabbath. But other Christians feel that the Scriptures only tell them to worship and to rest from their worldly labors, so finding ways to rest after going to church by eating out or watching football are allowable, as long as they don't head into the office and work. Both are ways of honoring the Sabbath that should allow the other their freedom. We cannot do away with observing the Sabbath, just as we don't do away with any of the other Ten Commandments, and we should embrace the Sabbath as a gift – enjoy your rest, enjoy not having to achieve, be renewed in your worship time. (We'll talk more about the Sabbath when we get to Luke 13 and 14.)

3) The choice of entertainment. Some Christians can handle R rated movies, for instance, that wrestle with complicated questions. Others will not allow themselves to listen to bad language or watch graphic violence. For the mature Christian adult, the choice is between them and God.

4) The way we school our children is an area of Christian freedom and discernment.

All of these areas and many more are areas of Christian liberty that we have to answer to God our Master for, but we are instructed not to judge one another in how we live them out. Otherwise, we risk being Pharisees, imposing our own personal standards on everyone around us. We don't answer to one another, we answer to God alone.

This morning, this Sabbath day, we invite you to feast and not to fast; to eat and drink with God's people who are the bride of Christ because we have joy that our Groom has given Himself for us. Like the man with the withered hand, Jesus wants to heal us, but His focus is on healing our souls, making us right with God the Father. Jesus went to the cross willingly to die in our place, the Scriptures say that He paid the price for our redemption. As we sang earlier: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe, sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."

What we eat and drink is not the ultimate feast that we will celebrate in heaven, but it is the food and drink that we share often that points us to that feast, that reminds us that it is coming. But we not only look forward with this meal, we look back. 1 Corinthians 11:26 says that "*as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*" Just as Jesus talked about new wineskins that were needed to hold this new movement of God that became Christianity, so Jesus brought new symbols of the new covenant. He said that this bread "*is my body*" and "*this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*" -> transition to the Lord's Supper

Benediction

2 Peter 3:18 - "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*"