

As Jesus' authority is established

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 September 2013

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] Now, over the last few weeks, we've been looking at chapters 5 and 6 of Luke's Gospel. We've been looking at how the Saviour's Kingdom grows as various things happen, as people are called into that Kingdom, as sin and death and disease retreat, and today as Jesus establishes his authority.

And we're going to begin by reading our passage, which is on page 861 of the Bibles, and we're going to read from verses 1 to 11.

Luke chapter 6, verses 1 to 11. A series of incidents that happen as Jesus is ministering in Galilee, around the Sea of Galilee, in the synagogues and also in the countryside and in the towns.

Chapter 6. On a Sabbath, while Jesus was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?

And Jesus answered them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, 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.

[1 : 25] And he said to them, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, Jesus entered the synagogue and was teaching.

And a man was there whose right hand was withered. 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.

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. 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?

Looking around at them all, he said to the man, 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.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now let's pray together. Lord God, we praise you that through the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit and the word you have given us, that we are able to share in the experience of those who heard the Lord Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry by the Sea of Galilee.

[2 : 47] We pray, Father, you will give us a listening heart to what he said, that we will not be closed, closed hearts and closed minds as many who hurt him, but that we will have the openness and the readiness to hear his voice and to obey that voice when we hear it.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. A young minister was called to a charge in a small highland parish.

He and his wife on the first Sunday went for a walk in the afternoon. And he was dismayed on arriving at evening service to be greeted by a delegation of his elders who said, don't you know that we do not go for walks on the Sabbath, as he called it.

And the young man says, but our Lord went for a walk on the Sabbath. Oh, said the senior elder, but he wouldn't have got away with that if he had been here. I have it on good authority.

That story is true. In other words, the opposition to Jesus and his ministry and his authority did not cease in the first century.

[4 : 03] It's very much still with us. And these two incidents centering around the Sabbath day are really incidents which underline and establish the authority of Jesus.

The other incidents so far have been doing that. He has called people to be his disciples. He has healed people. And once again, here he heals a man. He has preached the word.

And indeed, shortly in chapter six, he's going to preach at greater length. All these sorts of things, he's been establishing his authority. I want to say two things, first of all.

First of all, this is about the place of the Sabbath. Now, what was the Sabbath? If you read Genesis 2, it was the divinely appointed day of rest. God rested on the seventh day from all the work of creating he had done.

In other words, it was a gift, a gift of rest, a gift of peace, a gift of harmony. It was not designed to be a joyless imposition full of don't do this and don't do that.

[5 : 06] It was a gift to humanity. And also, and Jesus says elsewhere, the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. It wasn't a tyrannical imposition.

Now, many people think that you have to take two extreme, one of two extreme views on this. One is the Victorian Sunday, and there's a book of that name, and it's, it makes good in reading.

Sunday, usually called the Sabbath, is stripped of all its joy, all its, all its pleasure, all its sense of recreation, and everything becomes rule after rule, rule after rule.

Some people like that, of course. Some people like their lives to be governed by rules, because they don't have to make any decisions then. Every decision is made. But that's not, of course, the way in which you grow into maturity, by having rules forced on you continually.

On the other hand, some people simply say, there is nothing special about any day at all. We simply, we, it's Jesus's advocating a free for all here.

[6 : 16] And as we'll see, that's not the point of this story. Because the point of this story, so my second introductory point, is this is actually a story, a couple of stories about who Jesus is.

What is his authority? The Sabbath is appointed by God, a divinely appointed day of rest. If it's appointed by God, who has the authority, who can dare to interpret it, and see what is to be done, and what's not to be done?

And when Jesus declares himself to be Lord of the Sabbath, this is one of the many claims you get in the Gospels, where he's claiming to be equal with God. It's not so much in the Gospels that you get direct statements about, you do get some, like in John, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

But more often, Jesus, by doing things, by saying things, is doing and saying what only God could do and say without blasphemy.

What right does he have to say what is to be done, what's not to be done, and they stay? That's the concern at the very heart of these two episodes here, the episode of the disciples in the grain field, and the man with the withered hand.

[7 : 35] So let's keep that in mind then. Sabbath, a divinely appointed day, pointing ultimately to the new creation itself. There is no eighth day. Six days of creation, followed by the day of rest, the picture of eternity, picture of the new creation.

So let's take the first episode, verses one to five. Jesus is showing that he has authority to interpret what the Sabbath is about.

If you know the Gospels, you'll know that in Matthew chapter five and six, Jesus says, you have heard it said of old time, but I say to you.

Jesus is not setting aside the law there. He is saying, I am going to give you its true interpretation. No preacher today could dare to say, you have heard it said in Scripture, but I say to you.

If you ever hear any preacher saying that, walk out, because they are, they have no right whatever to say that. Jesus does have, and Jesus is not saying, the Old Testament law was wrong.

[8 : 46] He's saying, I'm going to tell you what it really means. And so it is here. Because the Old Testament did forbid work on the Sabbath, and that's the point of the Pharisees' criticism.

Verse two, why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? The disciples were plucking, eating some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands.

the Pharisees are basically saying, your disciples are working on the Sabbath. Now that, of course, is stretching the definition of work to a ludicrous degree.

It's rather like saying you're working, it's rather like saying you were working when you unwrapped the packet in which your sandwiches were in. That is actually the extent to which they're prepared to go in order to try to catch Jesus out.

Now it's very interesting to see how Jesus deals with this. Jesus deals with this by actually saying, look, you don't actually understand the Bible. You don't understand the Scriptures.

[9 : 47] Back in chapter four, this is what he had done when the devil quoted Scripture at him. He had said that's not what it means, the Scripture also says. And he's doing that here again.

This is the incident in 1 Samuel where David is being pursued and persecuted by Saul. The group of people with him are hungry, they are desperate and they go into and they enter the house of God and take the so-called bread of the presence.

Now the bread of the presence was one of the many objects in the temple which was there to teach people that God was holy. It was not normally something that people would eat.

Now Jesus, of course, does not attack that. Notice he doesn't say that law was wrong. He doesn't say that was a foolish law. What he does do is he says that law was never meant to exclude compassion and acts of mercy in time of meat.

He's not saying anyone at like can simply go in there and eat the bread when they want it. The problem with the Pharisees, of course, is that they are simply nitpicking.

[11 : 00] They are not serious. You see, neither the text of 1 Samuel or the priest on the spot condemned David and his men.

That is the point. Jesus is saying read the scriptures properly. Read them carefully. Find out what they are actually saying. But there is a deeper point here, I think.

David was not just an ordinary citizen. David was the Lord's anointed and therefore the consecrated bread was perfectly proper for him.

It wasn't just anybody coming in off the streets and grabbing the bread. This was God's anointed king. And you see the point in verse 5 then.

The Lord's anointed, the forerunner of Jesus, was perfectly entitled to take the consecrated bread. But now, great David's greater son is here, the son of man who is the Lord of the Sabbath.

[12 : 02] And the son of man who is the Lord of the Sabbath can interpret those scriptures about the Sabbath in a way that fits in with the scripture's intention. Remember, Sabbath, a day of rest, a day of renewal, a day of listening to God, a picture of the new creation and work and rest and prayer will all be united.

He is the Lord of the Sabbath, effectively saying he is Lord of time, special times and special places. Now, back in chapter 5 where he began this study when he calls when Peter is, when Peter has fished all night and caught nothing and Jesus tells him to go in again, they catch that huge amount of fish.

Jesus is showing Peter and his friends that he is Lord of the everyday. He is Lord of ordinary time, ordinary work. He knows more about ordinary work than they do.

Now, he is showing that he is Lord of special time as well as ordinary time. He is the authoritative interpreter of the law. What he is saying is what David did was in the spirit of the law.

David interpreted the law in terms of compassion. David was no author, he was the Lord's anointed and now the Lord of the Sabbath is here.

[13 : 27] He said, how dare you tell me and my disciples what to do on the Sabbath? I am the Lord of the Sabbath. Do you know what I mean when I said it's really about who Jesus is?

The Sabbath is only the presenting issue as we say nowadays. The real issue is who is this? Who is this that even the winds and the waves obey him? Who is this who says what the Sabbath is and what's to be done?

So that's the first little story here. He is the interpreter of the law about the Sabbath. Now the second incident which is linked with it because of the Sabbath on another Sabbath verse 6 he entered the synagogue and was teaching and a man was there whose right hand was withered.

He has the authority to define the spirit of the law. Now don't misunderstand this. I'm not saying the letter of the law doesn't matter.

Of course the law is to be obeyed. But remember what Paul says in Galatians the letter kills but the spirit gives life. How easy to obey rules and so often certainly in first century Palestine and so often in churches ever since people have gained a quite bogus and spurious reputation for godliness simply because they keep the rules.

[14 : 48] It's easy to keep rules. Rules are external things and however Jesus is saying the law is given not for externals the law is given so that people will see right into the heart of God.

Now let's look at this for a moment or two. And notice verse 7 the scribes and Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath. He has been in orchestrated campaign now.

These guys are following Jesus around and they're following him around not to learn from him not to worship him not to call him Lord and God they're following him around so that they can criticize him and criticize his disciples.

That word watched is the idea of side long glances out of the corner of the eye. Ever met anyone like that? You always feel guilty in their presence disapproving looks, snide remarks.

Well that's them. And notice in verse 11 that becomes mindless and murderous hatred. You see if people are prejudiced no amount of evidence will convince them.

[16 : 02] No whatever happens whatever is said they will remain invincible in their prejudice. A striking example occurs later in the Gospel of John. The wonderful miracle of Lazarus raised from the dead.

And what do we read? Scribes and Pharisees went away and said we better take Jesus seriously we better worship him. It doesn't say anything of the sort it says. They went away and made plans how they would kill him.

That's the way that prejudice always works. So that's the situation that's the atmosphere and I think two things here.

First of all these critics ignored not only what the Sabbath was about but the mission of the Lord of the Sabbath.

You'll notice verse eight he knew their thoughts. And verse nine I ask you is it lawful these are the wrong words is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm to save life or to destroy it.

[17 : 11] the whole point of Jesus coming was to save people. You will call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. Save ultimately of course from judgment, from sin, from death and hell but also to save from what makes life impossible for people.

The whole point of his coming really is like an hourglass passage. This little incident where once again notice an unknown nameless individual whose need is met.

I've said this already but I've become more and more impressed as I read these passages and indeed read the Bible as a whole. The amount of time given to nameless unknown individuals. This is not a celebrity he's healing.

This is not somebody important. A nameless man who flips across the page of scripture never appears again and Jesus is attracted to him because of his need.

And notice verse 10 after looking around at them all I wonder what that look was saying. That look was a look no doubt of disappointment first of all.

[18 : 23] No sheer disappointment came to his own. His own did not welcome him. A look of anger. You don't care about people. You don't worry about this man instead of your nitpicking and rules and regulations and probably a look of anger as well.

All these mingled emotions he looked round at them and said to the man stretch out your hand. He did so and his hand was restored. Notice it was the word of Jesus the powerful word that restored the man restored the man.

He speaks and listening to his voice new life the dead receive. This is a gospel story isn't it? So these people, the critics ignore not only what the Sabbath is about, they ignore what the Lord of the Sabbath has come to do.

But I think the main point I would want to make, the main point I would want to make about this whole incident is that this incident is demonstrating that Jesus is Lord.

Now that's a phrase that's easy to say but think about it for a minute or two. If he is Lord, that means that no power can stand against him, whether it's the power of sin, the power of disease, the power of death, the power of prejudice, power of hatred, no power can stand against him.

[19 : 51] But it also means he's going to have the final word. It means that he is going to speak the words which are going to stand once all their words have gone.

And that remains true. he is Lord of all who will respond to him and who will have no other master but him. That makes verse 11 a particularly terrifying verse.

They were filled with fury, discussed with one another. Now being filled with fury is no basis for a rational discussion, first of all. If you're filled with anger and fury, you're not going to say anything very sensible or come to any constructive conclusion.

But what they might do to Jesus. Now what they might do ultimately of course becomes murder, murderous hatred.

We will not have this man to reign over us. So you see now, let me just conclude by saying one or two things. Jesus is not saying you can forget about the Sabbath.

[21 : 00] He's not saying that at all. He's saying the Sabbath is being fulfilled in my coming. What does the Sabbath do? It points to the new creation, a place without disease, a place without death, a place without hatred and murder.

That's what he's saying. The new creation has already arrived. And because of that, when on earth, we're not in the new creation just now.

There have to be, of course. You can't give total freedom to people. I mean, otherwise you get anarchy. But the point he is making is this. Interpret these laws that the Lord God gave you in a way that's not uncompassionate.

The law, why was the Sabbath given? It was given to do good, not harm, to save life, not to destroy it. So as we read our Bibles, obviously, we fall very short.

We're guilty. We make all these kind of mistakes. But Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, the Lord of the Scriptures, the one to whom the Scriptures point, he is the only authoritative guide, and he calls us to follow him, he calls us to acknowledge him as Lord, and he calls us away from that prejudice and criticism and hatred and violence, which is so much the characteristic of what religion does.

[22 : 31] This is not about religion. This is about the living Lord. Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, how fickle and human we are.

We either run into ghettos with rigid rules, or we simply run away and do our own thing. Father, help us not just to say the words Jesus is Lord, help us to live these in our lives, help us to, when we say and sing these words, help us to mean in our hearts what we sing with our lips, and to carry out in our lives what we mean in our hearts.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Lord of heaven and earth. Amen. Amen.