



- Introduction – Joke – “Are you sure this is where he fell in?”
- There is a whole lot of missing the point going on in that joke.
  - The drunk utterly missed the point the preacher was attempting to make.
  - The preacher utterly missed the point of baptism.
- In our verses this morning, we witness yet another encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees, and once again, Jesus reveals to the Pharisees how badly they are missing the point.
- Read Luke 6:1-11
- Pray

These two passages culminate our current string of five consecutive pericopes in which Luke is describing why opposition to Jesus arose among the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. In other words he seems to be answering the question, “Why would anyone want to kill Jesus.” And, in response to this question, Luke has saved the most significant answer for last—that is, Luke has saved the controversies in these verses until the end of this section because they represent the Pharisees’ most significant complaint against Jesus and His message—the Sabbath.

Thus, we are blessed to consider these Sabbath controversies this morning, because, in them, Jesus teaches us the devastating degree to which the Pharisees were missing the point of true religion. And as we examine these verses over the next two weeks, we will do so in a sort of “what-not-to-do” lesson as inspired by the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, so that, unlike them, we will not miss the point of authentic Christian living.

- 1.) We miss the point whenever we give primary importance to secondary things.
  - Shouting at the referees – A silly rule of basketball trumps God call to peacefulness.

As I just mentioned, these first eleven verses of Luke chapter six cut straight to the heart of the Pharisees' disdain for Jesus, and the heart of the conflict surrounds the Sabbath. Of all the things the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law despised about Jesus, the Gospels seem to suggest that the Sabbath controversies drew their greatest ire. I think this is so because, at that time, official Judaism appears to have been about Sabbath observance more than anything else. That end-of-week routine, which began at sundown on Friday and continued through sundown Saturday, had become the anchor of first-century Judaism.

Yet, in these first eleven verses of chapter six we see the complete aversion Christ felt for what the Pharisees had done to the Sabbath. They believed and taught that if a man jumped through all of their self-made Sabbath hoops, then he had earned his righteousness. In fact, the Jewish leaders were completely devoted to their outrageous Sabbath observances because, for them, achieving salvation was primarily a matter of how well they did in this area. However, although they were prone to pat themselves on the back because of how well they were obeying all of their own Sabbath requirements, Jesus used this very same activity to confront them starkly with the truth. Therefore, as Jesus attacks their Sabbath structure, He is really aiming His words directly at the heart of the false religion that the Pharisees were peddling.

To understand fully the extreme nature of this conflict over the Sabbath, we first must realize how fanatical the Jewish leadership was about the Sabbath. The Sabbath day had become an exceedingly complex collection point for severe restrictions that had been accumulating for centuries. From roughly the time that the Jews returned to Israel from exile in Babylon until the day of Jesus, the Sabbath laws and limitations had been incessantly increasing and continually escalating. In their severely misguided pursuit of personal righteousness, the rabbis kept imposing more Sabbath regulations and restrictions. Then they would interpret those regulations and impose new ones. They kept on imposing, interpreting, reinterpreting, and then creating more regulations until this constant accumulation of restrictions made the Sabbath day—and listen to this—*the worst day of the week*. It was repressive, authoritarian, and ridiculously strict. And in our verses, we see Jesus attempting to show the Pharisees the vast difference between their man-made Sabbath and the true heart of God.

Let me show you what I mean. In Exodus 20:9, we find the fourth of the Ten Commandments, which is God's original command about the Sabbath, and I want you to notice how clear it is and how uncomplicated it is. Here is God's initial command about the Sabbath day. "*Six days you labor and do all your work. The*

*seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God, in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male, your female servant, your cattle, your sojourner who stays with you.”* Period. That is it.

Thus, the fundamental essence of God’s Sabbath Law is this: Don’t work. That is it, and if you ask me, it sounds pretty good. In fact, it sounds like a tremendously blessed and enjoyable idea. Who doesn’t like to take a day off to relax and refresh the body, mind, and spirit? Who among us couldn’t use a day off to focus on family relationships, enjoy God’s wonderful Creation, or take a leisurely stroll through town? That is the idea of the Sabbath. It was given as a command to be obeyed, but also as a gift from God to be enjoyed. It was given as a day in which God’s people could do almost anything at all, except the normal duties of their daily vocations. It was given as a day of restoration and recreation. That, I believe, is the main thrust of God’s command to honor the Sabbath. Just rest! Amen! Sounds great!

Now, as we contemplate this commandment about the Sabbath, it is vital for us to remember that the fourth commandment has not always existed. In fact, although we know that God rested from His initial act of Creation on the seventh day, He didn't command people to do likewise until the inception of Law of Moses, where we first see seventh-day rest commanded as was the fourth of the Ten Commandments. It was a ceremonial Law, and thus it is not repeated in the New Testament because it wasn't a part of moral law.

However, the idea of the Sabbath remains a wonderful, general gift from God not only to historic Israel but also to us, and I am certain that we are very wise think it's a very wise to honor this day of rest, even though God did not require it before the Mosaic Law and even though we are no longer obligated to it as new covenant believers. We are eminently wise to take a day off and enjoy the fun, fresh, and free lives that we have received in Christ.

However, this was most certainly not the atmosphere of the Sabbath in first-century Israel. On the contrary, the religion of the day had become so hollow, so hypocritical, and so superficial that Jews were taught to occupy the Sabbath jumping through ridiculous religious hoops in an attempt to earn God’s favor. Thus, each Sabbath day, Israel bowed down to an outrageous assortment of unbiblical rules and regulations with the aim of pleasing God and earning salvation.

Ultimately, therefore, the Sabbath became the most excruciatingly miserable day of the week. It was flooded with preposterous restrictions, and, frankly, people hated it. Allow me to give you a small taste of a day in the life of a first-century

Sabbath in Israel. And, please note, this will be but a small sample, because it would be almost impossible to relate it all.

- The Sabbath laws were a lot like our current income tax laws.
- The tax code just keeps getting bigger and more complicated, doesn't it?
- It began during WWI as a temporary 1% tax.
- No one ever improves it by subtraction, always addition.

The Sabbath Laws were like that. The Talmud, which is like an ancient rabbinical commentary on what we call the Old Testament, contained no less than 24 chapters on Sabbath Law. Not only that, but the rabbis were known to spend upwards of two years studying and reinterpreting any single one of those 24 chapters. It was an outrageously complicated system of rules and regulations, and it just kept growing like some bloodthirsty blob from a low-budget horror movie.

Here is just a small sample of these Sabbath day rules and restrictions. First, you couldn't travel more than 3,000 feet from home. That is, of course, unless you had planted food at or within those 3,000 feet on the Friday before the Sabbath, in which case you could then travel an additional 3,000 feet from that newly formed garden because it could be considered your temporary home since your food was there. Also, if you lived at the end of a long, narrow street, you could fasten a piece of wood, or a string, or a piece of your robe near the end of the street, and the rabbis said that doing so would, in the eyes of God, turn that makeshift landmark into a sort of new front door to your house, and then you could travel 3,000 feet from that spot.

But that is not all, as you traveled, you couldn't carry anything on your person that weighed more than a dried fig. Thus, if these laws were in effect today, the men here today could wave goodbye to their wallets. And for the women: Well, let me just say that I have seen your purses, and I can assure you that, under this Sabbath system, you would most certainly lose your salvation for lugging around those anvils.

The laws about food were just as staggering. For example, you couldn't pick any more grain than would fit in a lamb's mouth, and an egg couldn't be boiled, even if you buried it in the hot sand, which is how eggs were boiled in the desert. The laws go on endlessly in all kinds of ways about all kinds of foods, including wine, honey, milk, radishes, and olives. For instance, you couldn't leave a radish in the salt because doing so might turn it into a pickle. And if you happened to place a bad olive in your mouth and then spit it back out, the Talmud said you were

not allowed to replace it with a good one because your palate had already tasted the first one. Why? I don't know, because the Talmud contains chapter upon chapter of rabbis pontificating about what all of this stuff means.

A tailor couldn't carry his needle. A scribe couldn't carry his pen. A pupil couldn't carry his books. A fire could not be lit, nor could a fire already lit be extinguished. Cold water could be poured on warm, but warm couldn't be poured on cold. You couldn't take a bath for fear that your bathwater might overflow and you might accidentally wash the floor. You couldn't move a chair for fear that it might make a rut, and that would be too much like plowing. A woman was not allowed to look in the mirror or put on any jewelry, and if she were to find a white hair, she had to resist the temptation to pull it out. You couldn't even examine your clothes or shake the dirt out of them before putting them on, lest you shake too vigorously and accidentally killed an insect, because any type of killing was against the rules on the Sabbath. And if you happened to throw an object into the air, the law said that you had to catch it with the same hand with which you threw it. Catching it with the opposite hand was considered a sin because, apparently, doing this... (demonstrate)... is less work than doing this... (demonstrate).

Here is one final list of 39 forbidden activities from Alfred Edersheim's classic historical reference, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. All of the following activities were forbidden:

Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sifting, grinding, sifting in a sieve, kneading, baking... shearing the wool, washing it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning, putting it on the weaver's beam, making two threads, weaving two threads, separating two threads, making a knot, undoing a knot, sewing two stitches... catching deer, killing, skinning, salting, preparing its skin, scraping off its hair, cutting it up... writing two letters, scraping in order to write two letters... building, pulling down, extinguishing the fire, lighting the fire, beating with the hammer, and carrying one thing from one place to another. All forbidden!

And remember, under this Sabbath system, your salvation depends on doing all of this craziness. That is what the Jews were trained to believe. That is how they were taught to please God. Now, let me ask you, what kind of a day of rest day is that? It is certainly not the fun, fresh, and free lifestyle we discussed over the past two weeks! This is supposed to be the rest, and you can't even make sense of the stuff that you are not allowed to do. It was intended as a day of relaxation and

regeneration, yet, in reality, it was a day of immense religious pressure, in which you felt like you were certain to forfeit your soul with every motion.

-- *Little House on the Prairie* excerpt

This burdensome mentality is still prevalent in modern-day Judaism. In New York City, for example, orthodox Jews spend the Sabbath eating only cold leftovers and drinking day-old coffee because they are not allowed to prepare or cook anything on the Sabbath. Even some of the apartment buildings in Jewish sectors of New York City have what is called a “Sabbath elevator,” which is an elevator with no buttons. As it moves up and down, it stops at every single floor so that Jewish apartment residents can avoid the burden of pressing a button, because, of course, that would be work. In addition, many modern Jewish homes are equipped with Sabbath timers, which will automatically switch the lights on and off on the Sabbath because flipping the switch on the Sabbath is too much work, and is, therefore, a sin.

In this light, we can more fully appreciate the gracious appeal Jesus made to the Jews in Matthew 11:28-30. He said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” As you can see, the people to whom Jesus initially spoke those words lived an impossibly oppressive life. And in these verses from Matthew, we see Jesus setting the life He offers over against the outrageous and outlandish religion of Sabbath restrictions. // He offered them the fullness of rest that God intended in the original Sabbath command as opposed to the legalistic rituals, restrictions, and regulations that the people were convinced would earn them salvation.

The Jews were dead serious about the Sabbath, and in our passage this morning, Jesus is showing them that they were dead wrong. He was calling them to stop majoring on the minors. That is, He was teaching them how badly they missed God’s will for their lives by giving primary importance to secondary things. // He is still telling us the same thing today. The Pharisees had egregiously missed the point of true life. Will we likewise miss the point by giving primary importance to secondary things?

To answer that question, let us try to couch this discussion in terms a bit closer to our present-day experience. For instance: If my concern about what other people think of me drowns out my concern about what God’s thinks of me, then I

am missing the point of the purpose for which I have been created. If owning the nicest house in the nicest neighborhood in which I wear the fanciest clothes and drive the nicest car has become so important to me that I can no longer afford to tithe, then I am missing the point of the blessings God has given me. If I am giving into my children's adolescent desires and involving them in any and every secular activity so that they can be popular and talented has become more important to me than raising them in the training and instruction of God's Word, then I am missing the point of parenting. And, for us as a church, if, like the Pharisees, the policies and procedures of church administration are more important to us than *God's* Great Commandments and *His* Great Commission, then we are badly missing the point of the faith to which we have been called together in Christ.

Listen, there is nothing wrong with most any of those things I mentioned, in and of them selves. Nice houses, nice cars, and fancy clothes can be a great blessing, and our children can often benefit greatly from being involved in the right community activities and sports programs. Furthermore, not only can administrative policies and procedures be a good thing, but the right ones are quite necessary. However, we must emphasize what we said to introduce this point: We miss the point whenever we give primary importance to secondary things. And all of these things, no matter how great we think any of them might be, are all secondary things. In fact, as Jesus repeatedly makes clear throughout the Gospels, everything in this life is secondary to one just thing: Loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In fact, Jesus says exactly this in Mark 12:28-30:

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"*

There it is: The primary purpose of life is to love God. Knowing that, we can see how terribly the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law had missed the point. They had made external rules more important than internal righteousness. They had placed their version of religion above the relationship that God desired of them. In essence, they loved their laws more than they loved their Lord. They gave primary importance to secondary things. Do you? They had utterly and urgently missed the point. Are you missing it this morning?

Let us be sure we do not miss the point of authentic living in Christ. It's not about us; it's all about God! It's not for us; it's all for Him! Let us always remember that in any and every situation our most important calling is to love God with all we are in all that we say and in all that we do. Jesus declares in Luke 9:24, "*Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*" // Will you miss the point today, or will you lose the secondary things of life in order to love Jesus Christ who gave His life for you?