

Divine Truth Confronts Human Tradition

Luke 6:6-11

42-70

The other day I was driving along in my car and I wanted to catch up on the news, so I flipped on the car radio just in time to hear one of the radio commentators say, "We have one goal in our program." He said, "I am here to present my truth to you." He said, "I know I'm unique and nobody else can do what I can do. You say, we don't give you anybody else's truth, we give you our truth." What a bizarre statement. And that bizarre statement is the mantra of post-modernism. You have your truth, I have my truth, they have their truth and never the twain shall meet.

Truth is whatever anybody wants it to be. Obviously this bizarre lie has shaped our culture and even shaped the church which has become also somewhat subjective, eclectic, syncretistic, tolerant and compromising. And it can kind of sneak in, in a very subtle way, this idea that somehow truth is a very personal thing and my truth is my truth and your truth is your truth and I'm entitled to mine, and you're entitled to yours and that's how it is.

There are a lot of ways I could illustrate that but one that comes to mind, and I prepared this early in the week, was that there's a statement I hear Christians make all the time that I don't like. Don't make it when I'm around, please. It is this statement. "I'm going to share my faith." First of all, it's not your faith and you can't share it. Apart from that it may be a good statement but it has no meaning. What do you mean you're going to share your faith? If you mean you're going to explain the Christian faith, I can deal with that. That's objective. Sharing your faith is a subjective statement. It's not your faith and you can't share it as if you could cut off a piece and give it to somebody. But that's very popular in evangelicalism. I picked up *Grace Today*, this morning and there's a little line in here, "All believers have a responsibility to share their faith." It's happening right here in our own church before our very eyes. This is the end of something, I don't know what. Perfect timing, whoever put that in. Wow.

That is a not-so-very subtle overture to the post-modern mentality that says my faith is my faith and I certainly would be happy to share it with you. That's a not at all what we want to do. We want to explain the faith, the Christian faith, truth. And our model for that, our greatest example for that is the Lord Jesus, who throughout His ministry presented the truth. He presented the truth no matter how painful it might be for those who are hearing it, no matter how contrary to what they believed, no matter how attacking it might be against error, He presented the truth anyway. And we're learning, as we follow along, in the gospel of Luke that Jesus was relentlessly committed to the truth. He spoke the absolute truth into every situation. And either people accepted the truth, and rejected error, or they held tightly to their error and began to hate Jesus because they saw what He was doing as an attack on them. And it was.

There are two things that are distinct about the ministry of Jesus, two dominating core things. One is that He spoke the truth. Two is that He incited the hatred of people who held tightly to error. And eventually His relentless commitment to the truth and His incendiary inciting of hostility among those

who held onto error resulted in His execution. The hostility, of course, was primarily focused on the relationship between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees because they were the architects of the Judaism of the day which was not true Old Testament religion, but was a...a really a form of Judaism that was apostate and ungodly. It was a works system, a ceremony system, a system of legalism and ritual. And Jesus assaulted that system just by virtue of preaching the truth, and so He is pitted against the false religious leaders of Judaism who were primarily the scribes and Pharisees. There were other groups, such as the Sadducees but they were pretty much political. It wasn't what Jesus said about religion that bothered them, it was the potential of a political problem that Jesus could have generated against Rome that might cause them to lose their positions that got them involved in the issue. The Sadducees were religious liberals. They weren't concerned about religious issues. They were concerned about political ones.

The architects of the apostate form of Judaism that dominated the common people in the time of Jesus were the Pharisees and the scribes. And the truth of God coming through the teaching of Jesus was a direct assault on their system and consequently they were hostile to it. Either they believed it or they resented it. And sad to say, they were hard-hearted and obstinate and unbelieving and so they resented it and they continued to resent it more and more until it turned into a murder plot that was finally fulfilled in the execution of Jesus at the hands of the Romans.

Now just to understand, one statement puts it, I think, into clear understanding and that is this: The truth of God is the most important thing in the world. The truth of God is the most important thing in the world. It's more important than anything else, and it's more important than everything else combined. The truth of God is the most important thing in the world. And the reason there was conflict in the life and ministry of Jesus, conflict that led to His own murder is because He spoke the truth. But He had to speak the truth because the truth is the most important thing. The truth reveals God. The truth brings the message of forgiveness and salvation and the hope of eternal life. It must be spoken and it must be written no matter what the effects may be and the effects are predictable. On the one hand, some people believe and all heaven breaks loose. On the other hand, some people do not believe and all hell breaks loose. Those who teach the truth are going to confront error and there will be a positive result on the part of those who believe the truth, and a negative result on the part of those who hate the truth. That's just the way it is. In the mindset of sort of post-modern evangelicalism today, it's not popular to speak the truth. I said to the kids at the college earlier this week that if I ever do go on the Larry King program, I don't know if it will ever happen, it's on again, off again, but if I ever do go on there and he says to me, "What about the Jews?" which is what he always asks evangelical people, "What about the Jews who don't believe in Christ? Are they going to go to heaven? What about the Mormons who don't believe in Jesus the way you do, are they going to go to heaven? What about me if I don't believe that, am I going to go to heaven?" The answer is, the truth is no, no. That's the truth.

Now if I'm not a newsmaker when I arrive, at that point I become a significant newsmaker and immediately I know what will happen. If that does take place, I know exactly what will happen. The people who love the truth, believe the truth, proclaim the truth will rejoice, and everybody else will go on the attack. That's the way it is. And what you have today in evangelicalism is a mindset that says, "At all costs avoid that." And in order to avoid that, you have to mitigate the truth. You have to dance around the issues. Jesus never did that. Jesus spoke the truth into every situation. He spoke it not because He was forced to speak it. He didn't speak it passively. He didn't speak it under compulsion. He spoke it aggressively. He planned to speak it. He staged events to speak truth into the midst of error. He staged events to unmask the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. He staged events to

strike blows, fatal blows, at the core of apostate religion. He took every opportunity to do it publicly, and the more public the opportunity, the more eager He was to take it. He not only wanted to expose error to the people who were in error, who were the purveyors of error, but He wanted to expose error to everybody else who might be considering it and even to those people who had come to truth and might be attracted somehow by it. So He spoke against the error of His day with the truth in the most public forum.

The goal of a Christian is no different than that of Jesus. I suppose when people think about Jesus, they think to sort of characterize Him as a man of love. They need to be reminded, however, that He was the one who made the whip at the beginning of His ministry and cleansed the temple and did it again at the end of His ministry. He was the one who called the religious leaders of His day in Matthew 23 whited sepulchers painted white on the outside, but inside stinking and full of dead men's bones. He never minced words when it came to dealing with false religion; never minced words when it came to dealing with the leaders of false religious systems. He reserved the most severe diatribe that He ever preached in Matthew 23 for false religious leaders, purveyors of damning error. And what brought about the conflict that ended the life of Jesus was that He spoke truth into every situation and people who were in error and held tightly to that error hated the truth. And so they wanted to silence the one who spoke it.

Now that's what we find escalating as we move through the ministry of Jesus. Let's go back to chapter 6 where we pick up the narrative of Jesus. I want to just kind of talk a little bit more in some general terms before we look specifically at our text in the sixth chapter. Jesus was a preacher of truth. He preached the true gospel of grace and faith and forgiveness and eternal life. This brought Him into immediate conflict with Judaism, and particularly with the leaders of Judaism who had a lot at stake. Their power, their prestige, their popularity was at stake and they did everything they could to protect it. Jesus made it very clear, and I think this is important to remind you about, that there was no compatibility between His message and existing Judaism. There is no compatibility between error and truth. And we saw that incompatibility didn't we, at the end of chapter 5 when Jesus gave two parables. In one parable He said you cannot take a new piece of garment and sew it into old cloth. It won't work. The old cloth will rip and tear when it's washed because the new garment will shrink and it will pull those threads right through that old fabric. You cannot take, He said, brand new wine which is going to ferment and expand and put it into an old parched, brittle wineskin because that expansion will take place, it will crack that hard old wineskin and it will all leak out. What He was saying was you can't take the truth; you can't take the gospel and put it into any other context of error. It's incompatible. It can't be connected to Judaism. That was the main point, or any other false system of religion. So He has already made very clear the incompatibility between His message and existing religion; Judaism in that case and for that matter, any other religion of works that is apart from the gospel.

Now in showing the distinction between the truth and the error of Judaism, Jesus eventually had to get to the heart of Judaism. And the heart of Judaism, not peripheral, the heart of it was Sabbath observance. Even today, if you know anything about Orthodox Jewish people, everything seems to focus on the Sabbath. The Sabbath becomes the key, the point of all points in the discussion of Judaism and in the observance of its rituals and laws. Everything comes down to Sabbath. What we find here in the beginning of chapter 6 then is the conflict reaching its zenith when Jesus assaults the Sabbath, when Jesus assaults the Sabbath. His relentless commitment to the truth of necessity led Him into this assault on the Sabbath. And we're going to see again as we saw it last time in the first five verses, we're going to look at verses 6 through 11, another assault on the Sabbath.

Let me say something that I want you to apply into your own thinking at whatever level it concerns you. It's a simple statement but I want you to remember it. Jesus was not a Sabbatarian. Jesus was not a Sabbatarian. For some of you that may mean a little. To some of you it means a lot because you may be discussing or reading in the Sabbatarian debate. Jesus was not a Sabbatarian. Jesus did not observe the Sabbath in the traditional fashion. In fact, Jesus saw the Sabbath observance of the Jews as ungodly, unbiblical, and the focal point of false worship and false religion.

If you will remember last time, I told you that when God gave the Sabbath law — and God did give Sabbath law back in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 — all He said was, "On the seventh day, rest." That's it. Just rest, don't work. Don't let your family work. Don't let your animals work. That will give you an opportunity to be restored in your body, to be restored a little bit in your family. You spend some time with family and primarily a time to worship God. Don't work, that was it. It was a prohibition. There weren't a lot of things you were supposed to do, there was just one thing you weren't supposed to do and that was don't work, time for restoration, recreation, diversion, worship, fellowship, simple, simple command. But the rabbis through the centuries had embellished that simple command with all kinds of rituals and laws. In fact, they had taken it to the place where it made the Sabbath day, which was supposed to be a day of rest, the worst day of the week. most difficult and most wearying day of the week because they had added to it so many prescriptions that had to be observed. It got to the point of absolutely being ridiculous. And it was ridiculous a long time before Jesus came along. It had been ridiculous for a very long time.

For example, one of the remarkable indicators of how ridiculous their Sabbath observance had become is found under the uprising under Judas Maccabaeus. In the time of Judas Maccabaeus there was a great revolt against Antiochus, who was the Greek who was dominating Israel. And under Judas Maccabaeus certain Jews sought refuge in the wilderness in caves. And historians who tell us that Antiochus sent a detachment of men to attack them, to attack these rebellious Jews and the attack of the Greeks under Antiochus came on Sabbath day. And historians write, "These insurgent Jews died without even a gesture of defiance or defense because to fight would have been to break the Sabbath." First Maccabees tells us how the forces of Antiochus gave them battle with all speed. It says, "Howbeit they answered them not nor cast they a stone at them, nor stopped the places where they lay hid." In other words, they didn't block off the places they were hidden, "But said, 'Let us die in our innocency. Heaven and earth shall testify for us that you put us to death wrongfully.' So they rose up against them in battle on the Sabbath and they slew them with their wives and children and cattle to the number of a thousand people." So they all just rolled over and died because they didn't want to violate the Sabbath, and let them massacre their children and everything they had.

That is the folly to which this kind of Sabbath observance eventually went. As I said, they had concocted these incredible schemes which Jesus referred to in Matthew 11:28 when He said to people, "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I'll give you rest." You don't need that kind of system, come to Me, I'm rest. And that's a play on the word "Sabbath," which means rest.

So the core... And I won't go back over all the things we covered two weeks ago. You can get the tape on that, but the core of the system was Sabbath observance. And if Jesus was to expose the bankruptcy and apostasy of Judaism, He had to assault the Sabbath, and He did. Let's go back to the 6th chapter.

The first four verses, just a reminder, you remember, "It came about on a certain Sabbath, He was passing through some grain fields, the disciples were picking and eating the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands." Now the Old Testament, you remember, provided for that. In the Torah, the Pentateuch, God had said, if you're a traveler, you can...you can pick grain with your hands in somebody's field, rub it together, and that's a kind of grinding process. And then a winnowing process, blow away the chaff and eat the grain if you're hungry. And you can do that, the law allowed for that. But the rabbis had come up with the idea that you couldn't do that on the Sabbath because picking was harvesting and rubbing was grinding and blowing was winnowing and so you had worked and you were in violation of the Sabbath. They saw Jesus' disciples doing what the Old Testament said they could do. Some of the Pharisees in verse 2 said, "Why do You do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Not because God forbid it, all God ever said was rest, enjoy the day, do whatever brings enjoyment for the day. It was their ridiculous tradition that accuses these men of harvesting and grinding and winnowing because they simply rubbed a little grain together in their hands.

Jesus answered them by reminding them of an Old Testament event. "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him?" David was escaping from Saul, you remember. He comes down not too far from Jerusalem to where the tabernacle was. He enters the house of God, got permission from the priest because they were so hungry, escaping from Saul with their lives. And they actually ate the showbread, the consecrated bread that was put on the table in front of the holy place, which it's not lawful for anybody to eat except the priests and God made that rule. That was part of the Old Testament tabernacle prescription. But David ate the very bread that was not to be eaten by anybody but priests and his companions ate it as well. Bottom line, Jesus was saying, look, even a law that God made can be...ceremonial law, not a moral law, but a ceremonial law that God made or a symbolic law that God made can be violated for the sake of human need, for the sake of mercy, for the sake of compassion. Let alone some ridiculous rules that you guys made. Don't you understand that?

And so, He struck a huge blow at their whole Sabbath system, and He wasn't done. Verses 6 to 11, "And it came about on another Sabbath that He entered the synagogue and was teaching and there was a man whose right hand was withered and the scribes and Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath in order that they might find reason to accuse Him. But He knew what they were thinking and He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Rise and come forward.' And he rose and came forward. And Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to destroy it?' And after looking around at them all He said to him, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he did so and his hand was restored." Here's the response. "But they themselves were filled with rage and discussed together what they might do to Jesus."

This is a fascinating account. As I told you earlier, Jesus was not a Sabbatarian. And that sort of poses the question. How did Jesus treat the Sabbath? How did Jesus treat the Sabbath? Answer, any way He wanted. Why? Verse 5, "The Son of Man is (what?) Lord of the Sabbath." You won't tell Me what to do on the Sabbath. I will do what I want on the Sabbath. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. He paid absolutely no attention to their regulations, absolutely none. In fact, we could use the word "defiance." He took a defiant posture against Sabbath law. In essence, was taking a defiant posture against Judaism, the Judaism of that day. Jesus did exactly whatever He wanted to do on the Sabbath and mostly what He wanted to do was defy their ridiculous works system of ceremony, religion...ceremony, I should say, ritual and tradition. And He specifically staged Sabbath defiance

events right in front of the leaders purposely because it was critical that the whole system of ceremony and works and ritual be struck down. And in John's gospel, chapter 5 and verse 18, John writes, "For this cause the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him because He was not only breaking the Sabbath but was also calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." It was the combination of Sabbath violation and calling Himself Lord and God that infuriated them and led to His execution. Jesus is not a Sabbatarian. In fact, the Lord revealed the truth about Sabbath observance in Colossians 2:16. This is the Lord of the Sabbath speaking through the apostle Paul, verse 16 of Colossians 2, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day." Don't let anybody sit in judgment on you for how you observe a Sabbath. "Those things are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

The shadow is past. Listen, Jesus cancelled out the Sabbath observance of Exodus, to say nothing of canceling out the non-biblical Sabbath traditions that had grown up around apostate, works-oriented Judaism. Jesus was the true Sabbath rest, Hebrews 3 and Hebrews 4 tell us.

So, Jesus and in the New Testament the epistles of the New Testament repeal the Sabbath law of Exodus 20 and also attack false Sabbatarianism, the religion of works. And Jesus said in verse 5, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath, you won't tell Me how to observe this day, I'll observe it any way I want." This was absolutely the last straw. This is the zenith of conflict because when you've attacked the Sabbath, you have attacked the high point of the religion.

Let's see how He staged this event. Verse 6, "It came about on another Sabbath," it doesn't tell us when, it could have been close to the earlier one. Luke doesn't have them together because of chronology. He has them together because he's dealing with Sabbath issues. Some other Sabbath, He's probably still in Galilee, of course, at this time and some commentators think He may well have been at Capernaum which was the headquarters town for His ministry in Galilee. But whatever, it was another Sabbath. And He was in the synagogue, it says He entered the synagogue and was teaching. And I've said this before, I'll say it again, the primary ministry of Jesus was to teach, to teach, to teach. He came to teach the gospel of grace and forgiveness, the gospel of salvation, the gospel of faith. Teaching was His priority. At the very outset of His ministry, chapter 4 verse 15, He began in their synagogues teaching and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth and He opens the Scripture and He's teaching. That was His pattern. There was one thing Jesus did on the Sabbath. What was it? He went where? To worship, that's what He did. Essentially that's all He observed. He didn't work and He went to worship. That really is the sum of what God had required for Sabbath observance.

And very often when He went to the synagogue He was asked to teach. He was prominent. He was famous. His reputation was widespread. They knew Him to be a healer. They knew Him to be one who could cast out demons. They had heard about the message that He was preaching and where He went it would be very hard for Him to be just an observer. And so here in this synagogue, whatever synagogue it was, He was asked to teach. The ruler of the synagogue would have read a scripture, the scriptures for the day and Jesus would take the posture of the teacher, sitting in front of the congregation and expositing or explaining the scripture. And that's what He was doing. It's not really important here that the message He gave be recorded because essentially it would have been the same message He gave which is recorded back in the fourth chapter. It was the gospel, it was the good news to the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed that they could be forgiven and set free from all the oppression and bondage of false religion and all the shame and guilt of their sin and the

judgment of God. They could be liberated from their spiritual blindness and they could be freed to understand the truth and the hope of eternal life would belong to them. It was that same message, the same gospel that we proclaim even now.

And there He was and He was teaching, which was His common pattern. "And there was a man there whose right hand was withered." This is perfect. This is the perfect man to stage the event that Jesus wants to stage to assault the Sabbath and therefore to strike the false religion of Judatam...Judaism at its heart. The man is the main object of Jesus' attention. It's more important in this account than what He was saying to note the man. Only Luke...Matthew has the same story, Mark has the same story, but Luke's the only one who says it was his right hand. Maybe that was because Luke was a doctor and he was a little more observant of those kinds of things. But this man had a right hand that was withered. The word "withered" has to do with something that's shriveled, something that's atrophied no doubt from paralysis. A paralysis had caused some kind of atrophy to take place. It's a word used of dried plants, dry dead wood, and dried fruits. So this man had a hand that was not able to be used, and probably hadn't been used for a long time, long enough to have shriveled.

So in verse 7 it says, "And the scribes and the Pharisees... Now they were watching Him closely." So now we have the second group of people that are going to play into this. The first character in the drama is the man with the withered hand. And now we meet these relentless scribes and Pharisees who are dogging the steps of Jesus. They're going to be there all the time, folks, so get used to them, all the way through to the end. And it says they were watching Him closely. Interesting verb, *paratēreō*. *Tēreō* means to watch carefully. *Para* means alongside of, it's a preposition, alongside of, beside. So they were as close to Jesus as they could get. I mean, they were looking intently with intensive scrutiny and it has a sort of a sinister tone. Watching Him carefully, this is not casual observance, they're not watching Him, although they would like everybody to think it, with some objectivity, it says here they are watching Him very, very intensely. "They are scrutinizing Him very closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath."

That's what they wanted to see. Would He heal on the Sabbath? This is amazing to me. I mean, I read that and when I began to look at this passage and I just thought, "This is amazing, amazing." You say, "Well maybe they... Maybe they wanted to know if He was the Messiah if He could heal, or if He was God. If He could heal, they might believe He was the Messiah. Wasn't that what His healing was supposed to evidence?" Yes. "Maybe they would know He was God. Maybe they would tend to believe in Him."

No, it says in verse 7, "They wanted to see if He healed on the Sabbath in order that they might find reason to accuse Him." I mean, how blind can you be, how obstinate can you be, how stubborn, how willful can you be to say, I want to see Him heal, I hope He heals somebody? You say, "Well they were supposed to be the great guardians of the Sabbath." That's right; they were supposed to be the guardians of the Sabbath. They wanted Jesus to break the Sabbath. They're so phony. They're so hypocritical. They weren't the moral guardians of the Sabbath saying they wanted to look and see if Jesus might heal on the Sabbath so they could stop Him from violating the Sabbath. No, they wanted Him to violate the Sabbath so they could indict Him for it.

And what is so amazing to me is it just goes right by their obstinate hearts that He could heal. You'd think somebody would have written that they wanted to see Him heal so they could believe in Him. They wanted to see Him heal so they could accuse Him. They wanted to see Him heal so they could

get rid of Him. The healing completely escapes them. They are so deep into the darkness of their false religious system. They knew He could heal, they knew that. Back in chapter 5 verse 17, a group of them came and the power of the Spirit of God came upon Jesus for healing, they knew He could heal. Thousands of people in Palestine by this time had been healed in the Galilee area of Israel. They knew He could heal. They also knew that He forgave sin. Chapter 5 verses 20 and 21, He forgave a man's sin right before them. These things didn't seem to register to them. Here was one who could heal diseases, forgive sin, and the evidence that He could forgive sin was that He could heal diseases which are the result of sin in the world. It goes right on by their stubborn, obstinate hearts. And the only reason they wanted Him to heal to demonstrate that He was God and could create was so that they could indict Him for being a Sabbath breaker. Boy, how convoluted is their thinking? So, do a miracle not so we can know You're Messiah, but so that we can indict You as a blasphemer.

Now you say, "What's the deal? So what if He heals on the Sabbath?" Well, you have to understand the background. That's why I'm here, to tell you the background. The rabbis had determined that it was a violation of Sabbath to make anybody better, OK, to help anybody, to bind up anybody's wounds, to alleviate their suffering. No physician could help a patient, no relatives or friends could help a person who was ill on Sabbath because that was work and you couldn't do it. You can actually find this in Sabbath regulations that are part of Jewish writings in the past.

Now, the sick person would have to wait till the next day, couldn't help them on the Sabbath. The distressed person, the person in trouble, it didn't have to be just a physical malady. You couldn't help them, that would be a violation of Sabbath day so you had no compassion, no mercy on people in need on the Sabbath' unless, the rabbis said, and I've discovered this in two different sources, Shab 18:3, Yoma 8:6, the rabbis modified the restriction and said you can help them if they were going to die because they might be dead before the next day comes. You can help them if they're going to die. You could also deliver a baby that was being born. This is a nice concession. I don't know what the alternative would be. But they took it so seriously that if you actually moved to better someone's physical condition on the Sabbath, you were a blaspheming lawbreaker. Amazing. They were not objective, devout protectors of the Sabbath law. They wanted Jesus to violate the Sabbath. Overlooking the messianic credentials of such a healing, they saw it as a way to accuse Him of blasphemy.

They didn't say this, they're just there looking, they didn't have to say it. Look at verse 8, I like this, "But He knew what they were (what?) thinking." Boy, what an advantage, huh? You've got your enemies there and you know exactly what they're thinking. He knew exactly what they were thinking. They were thinking, "Heal, heal, blasphemer, and then we'll indict You," while they were smiling and watching, not saying anything. He knew exactly what they were thinking. This too is a pattern. Back in chapter 5 verse 22 with the healing that He did of the man who was let down through the roof, verse 22, "Jesus aware of their reasonings." He knew exactly what they were thinking. Chapter 9, I think it's verse 47, "Jesus knowing what they were thinking in their heart." He always knew what was in the mind of people because He's God and He has omniscience. You see it again in chapter 11 verse 17; chapter 24, verse 38; tremendous advantage, only God has that advantage. He knew exactly what they were thinking.

Now you might have said, "Oh, He knew what they were thinking and He certainly didn't want to offend them. He wanted to make sure there was wonderful harmony, so He refused to heal because it would be an offense." Just the opposite. He knew exactly what they were thinking so He

said...stops His teaching. They're just standing there in the synagogue. Jesus is teaching. He stops the teaching because He reads their minds, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Arise, come forward, you with the bad hand come forward, you with the bad hand, come forward." Well, Jesus spoke with such authority like no one who ever lived and the guy found himself popping off His bench and he's up there in the front, in front of everybody. Now remember, the Pharisees haven't said anything. He knows what they're thinking. He knows they want Him to heal somebody and He's going to do it. So He calls up this man and the reason He called a man with a withered hand was because it wasn't a death-threatening issue, or a life-threatening issue. So this was a man you shouldn't help, this guy wasn't on the brink of death. He could have waited till Sunday, the next day. He's a perfect candidate to stage this assault on the Sabbath. So He tells him to come forward. He comes forward. I mean, life was difficult for him because in that culture you earned your bread by the sweat of your brow and the use of your hands, right? And this man had suffered, obviously, because of this paralysis.

And so Jesus sets him in the middle of the synagogue in front of everybody. The stage is set for a direct assault on the Sabbath. And Jesus said to them, He looks right to the Pharisees and scribes who always love to have the chief seats in the front seats so they were the front-row gang, most likely. He said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful." They probably looked at each other when they heard that much and said, "He's in our zone, lawful, that's us, we know that stuff." That's their thing, lawful. "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to destroy it?" Now remember, everybody is listening. This is a guy standing there with this atrophied hand and it's a pretty dramatic moment. "Is it lawful, you guys are the experts," there's a little sarcasm there, "you certainly know the answer to this question, this will be easy for you, you know the law, you're the experts, is it lawful to do good and to provide deliverance to someone in need or to do evil and destroy?"

You know, Jesus is a master at this. He asks the question that you can't answer. They can't answer it. There is no way they could answer it. If they say, "Well, it's...it's lawful to do good and it's certainly lawful to...to help someone," then they would affirm that Jesus could heal the man and He wouldn't violate the Sabbath and they've got no accusation because they've just given Him official authorization. They can't do that, that doesn't serve their purpose. On the other hand, if they say, "Well no, it's lawful to do evil and destroy somebody," they have just revealed their merciless, wicked hearts and they can't do that either. They can't do anything. Jesus pretty much made a career out of asking them questions they could never answer. Either they had to affirm Jesus, or condemn themselves. And they don't want to do that, they don't want to affirm Jesus, and they don't want to condemn themselves, so they just sit there.

Now there's a right answer to that but they can't give it. You say, "What's the right answer?" They knew the right answer. Go back to Isaiah 1. They had read Isaiah, you can be sure the Pharisees and the scribes had read Isaiah, even if they didn't get through the whole book, if they just read the first chapter they would know the answer to the question. Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 11, they knew what God desired. This is very interesting, Isaiah 1:11. Here God is indicting Israel back in Isaiah's time for their superficial, shallow, false religion, same kind of thing that Jesus is addressing. In verse 11, "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Sure, I gave the sacrificial system, but I don't care about your sacrifices, they don't mean anything to Me. Says the Lord, "I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle, I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats." In other words, your whole religious system and all these things that you do is unacceptable to Me, I've had enough of it, I don't want any more of it. "And when you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts?" How dare you come in here with your sacrifices!

How dare you come in here with the externals, the ceremonies, the rituals, the offerings! How dare you come in and in a sense trample My courts! Obviously it's because your hearts are so wretched. "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, your incense is an abomination to Me, new moon, Sabbath, the calling of assemblies I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly." I am sick of your Sabbaths, I'm sick of the whole thing. All of that structure was simply a way to give people an expression for their true-hearted worship, but there was no true-hearted worship and so the structure itself became abominable in the sight of God. The whole thing, He says in verse 14, is a burden to Me, I'm weary of it and when you spread out your hands in prayer, I'll hide My eyes from you, when you bring your multiplied prayers, I'm not going to listen because your hands are covered with blood. Verse 16, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from my sight, cease to do evil." Verse 17, "Learn to do good, seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."

What is He saying here? Help people, show compassion, show mercy, do good. That's the answer to the question Jesus asked. Is it right on the Sabbath to do good? Yes, it's right on the Sabbath to do good. Isaiah 1 says that. Don't come in here with your sacrifices, and your ceremonies, and your externals and a wicked, evil heart. Clean your heart out and do good and help people and show mercy. And close to the end of Isaiah, chapter 58 which they also would have been very familiar with and have studied fastidiously, Isaiah 58:6, He says, OK, you're going to fast? Let me tell you the way to fast. This is the fast that I choose." Verse 6, Isaiah 58: "Loosen the bonds of wickedness, undo the bands of the yoke, let the oppressed go free and break every yoke." Lighten up, guys. Take the yoke off that you're binding on these people. Verse 7, share your bread with hungry people, bring a homeless person into your house. When you see somebody who is unclothed, clothe him and don't hide yourself from your own flesh. You know what that scene is, right? "Oh no, your mother-in-law is at the door, don't answer it and she'll think we're not here." Don't do that. Do what's right.

Down in verse 13, "If because of the Sabbath you turn your foot from doing your pleasure on my holy day and call the Sabbath the delight, the holy day of the Lord, honorable and shall not honor it, desisting from your own way...and shall honor it desisting from your own ways from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the Lord." So do this on the Sabbath, do what honors God. Do good. Do good and the Lord's going to bless you, He says.

So, back to Luke, I mean they knew what God felt about their ridiculous, external observance. They knew the Sabbath of all days was a day to do good. It was a day to show mercy and kindness. But they had so strangled the Sabbath that there was very little space for that and they certainly couldn't admit that this was right. They couldn't say to Jesus, "Yes, this is the day by virtue of what it says in the Old Testament in Isaiah. This is a day to do good. This is a day to show mercy to someone. This is a day to deliver someone. It is that kind of a day." Then when Jesus healed, they wouldn't have any way to accuse Him. On the other hand, they couldn't say what they really thought or they would have unmasked themselves as wicked, merciless phonies. So they can't say anything.

But, listen to this. Here's the real issue. That was there but it went much deeper than that. While Jesus on the surface seemed to be talking about what He was going to do for that withered hand, at least that's what the crowd heard, that's what the synagogue crowd heard, remember now, the crowd doesn't know what they're thinking, right? They don't know that they've got these murderous intentions, these desires that Jesus would violate the Sabbath so they can accuse Him and get rid of Him. The crowd doesn't know that. So they hear a very simple question, very simple straightforward question: Should you do good or not? And they're all saying, "Do good, of course, we would do good,

we do good. We deliver, that's what God would want, of course." They can't say that. They're stunned, they're stuck. And there's something going on in their mind that's much deeper than what those people in the crowd understood that day and this is it. Jesus was referring not so much to their attitude toward that man, would they want him to receive good or evil? But what Jesus is saying is related to their attitude toward Him. And the real question is, gentlemen, which of us is honoring God? Is it I who want to do good for this man and deliver him from this life infirmity? Or is it you who want to destroy Me?

Now you're down to the real issue. "Which of us pleases God? Is it I? Or is it you? I want to help a man, you want to destroy Me." I mean, He nailed them. They have nowhere to go. Believe me, Jesus made it clear all through His ministry that the Sabbath observance is no litmus test of faithfulness to God, never, never has been and certainly isn't now. They observed Sabbath law while plotting to murder the Lord of the Sabbath. It's amazing, isn't it? The religious mind. One writer says, "The religious mind is a curious thing. It's not necessarily interested in common morality, still less in relieving human misery and affliction. It is interested in keeping rules, particularly the rules which spring from its own cherished interpretations of Scripture and tradition and to these interpretations it will attribute the inflexible authority of God." And then he said, "Let God incarnate contrary to its interpretations interpose with a miracle of divine goodness to relieve human misery, and then instead of revising its interpretation, the religious mind will plan to stop such miracles from ever happening again." How twisted. It's more than that. The religious errorists will try to kill the messenger of truth.

Listen, Jesus wasn't the only one who died for the gospel, people are dying today for the gospel. More people are being martyred today for the gospel than in any time in the history of the church. That's the way it is when you preach the truth.

Well, they have nothing to say and it's clear in verse 10 that they were in shock. "And after looking around at them all..." That's interesting. There's a delay here. Why does it say, "After looking around at them all"? What does that matter? There's some space here and Jesus is waiting for an answer. "Are you the good guys who seek to murder Me? Are you the ones who please God, who seek to kill Me? Or am I the one who pleases God by seeking to relieve this man's misery?" And He just looked at them.

I can imagine they never forgot the eyes of Jesus. I don't think He ever dropped His eyes, I think He had the capability to stare into their eyes in a fixed gaze that penetrated to their souls and indelibly etched them with the vision. Couldn't say anything. Nothing to say. They couldn't say, "Yeah, we...we're wicked people and we...we don't want to do good to anybody and we want to kill You." They couldn't say that but that was the truth. And they certainly couldn't affirm that you should do good or they would have let Jesus off their hook. So they said nothing.

After silencing them, verse 10 says, "He said to him," the man's still standing there through all of this, you know, going back and forth between the two in the dialogue, "Stretch out your hand." Four Greek words are written here by Luke to record this: *ekteinōn ten cheira su*, stretch out your hand. "And he did so and it was restored." Probably pulled it out and ptooo, God created a new hand, brand new hand, astonishing miracle, astonishing miracle. God had just endorsed His Son through creative power, astonishing. And you would expect the next verse to read, "And the Pharisees and scribes believed."

Well verse 11 says, "They themselves were filled with (what? wonder?) rage," rage. It's an interesting

word, rage, it...I don't know what your version says. Some of you have a version that says "madness," *anoios* in the Greek. *Nous, noieo* means "to know." A is what's called an alpha privative. That means it's an "a" or alpha put on the front of a word that negates the word. A gnostic is somebody who knows, an agnostic is somebody who doesn't know. We have preserved some of that into English. *Anoios* means to be devoid of understanding. They lost their minds. They were at their wit's end. That's what it means. They flipped out. I mean, it was a kind of rage where they lost their control over their minds, rage. "And they discussed together immediately what they might do to Jesus." We have to kill Him. See, the whole thing of the miracle just completely escapes them. "He that is convinced against his will is unconvinced still." This is the blindness and the obstinacy of the heart of those who were deep in false religion. And their fury is motivated by fear. People don't lose it, they don't lose it to this degree, they don't go out of their minds, become devoid of understanding, go mad unless there's something monumental at stake. They were afraid of Jesus, terrified. He was striking fatal blows at their whole system, striking fatal blows at their power, their prestige, their position, their religion, their credibility. They went into paroxysms of psychopathic rage. I suppose there are some people who might unwittingly think that something Jesus did in the last week of His life caused the Jews to crucify Him. Look, we're almost two years from there here and they already are literally out of their minds with the desire to kill Him. This goes on for a couple of years before they're able to bring their plot to its fulfillment.

And, beloved, I'm telling you this, this is not because Jesus had defective social skills. This is because Jesus spoke the truth into every situation. Matthew records this same story in the twelfth chapter and he concludes the story by saying. "He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.'" He stretched it out, was restored normal like the other, "but the Pharisees went out and counseled together against Him as to how they might destroy Him." Jesus said, "Who's the good guy in God's eyes? Am I who seek to do good and save a life? Or are you who seek to harm and destroy?" And He said that to them and Matthew says they went out to decide how they could destroy, same word. And Mark says they did a very interesting thing, "They went out, immediately began to take counsel with the Herodians as to how they might destroy Him." They were going to have to have some help from the Herodians. They were the people in the political power. And the Pharisees hated the Herodians, but they liked them if they needed them to help them to kill Jesus.

So at this point here we are only in the sixth chapter of Luke and the position of Judaism, the official position of Judaism on Jesus is fixed. We want Him dead. Their plan to kill Him out of hate fit perfectly into God's plan to kill Him for love's sake, right?

And by the way, they were amassing all these accusations on the Sabbath against Him. When it came to the final indictment and they took Him before the mock trial, they never brought up His Sabbath violations. It's interesting, they never brought them up because they wouldn't hold any power with the Romans and they found some better false accusations in the end. But at this point they were planning to use them to get rid of Jesus.

Summing it up, you see Jesus the representative of the truth of God, Pharisees and scribes representative of false religion. The contrast is startling. It's the contrast between divine truth and human tradition. It's the contrast between profound knowledge and madness. It's the contrast between goodness and wickedness, between compassion and indifference, between open honesty and hidden deception, between divine power and impotence, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. So at this point early in the gospel of Luke, the storm clouds begin to gather on the horizon that eventually are going to rain down on Jesus on the cross of Calvary. They will not

submit to the Lord of the Sabbath. They will rather execute Him. They will hold tightly to damning error and reject saving truth.

Really sad for those Pharisees and scribes, isn't it? But I have just a bit of good news for you. Listen to this, Acts... By the way, there's only about 6,000 Pharisees, they were the architects of that religious system, only about 6,000 of them, listen to Acts 15:5. "But certain..." don't have to look it up, just listen, Acts 15:5 "certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up." Ah, grace even penetrated the Pharisees. That's good, isn't it? In fact, one of those Pharisees became the great apostle Paul. This is grace, this is grace, to those who once were part of plotting to kill Christ and in the case of Paul, to kill Christians, came the grace of salvation and forgiveness. I don't know what your attitude has been toward Jesus Christ, but God will forgive you if you will come to Him in faith and receive Him as Lord and Savior.

Father, we thank You for again the power of the life of Jesus and the words of Jesus even many, many centuries after He walked on this earth. And that power is conveyed to us because we have the Word of God, the Bible. We thank You for that. We thank You for this incredibly wonderful insight into the fact that Jesus relentlessly, uncompromisingly and unhesitatingly spoke the truth into every situation, understanding the cost, that on the one hand it would cause all heaven to break loose in praise, on the other hand it would cause all hell to break loose in persecution. So it has to be that Jesus came as was said when He was a baby, for the rising and falling of many. And we pray today that all who hear this message, they embrace the miracle worker, the Savior, as their own, believing and receiving forgiveness by grace and eternal life. To that end we pray that You might forever be glorified. Amen.

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