

The Law or the Lord

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Date: 12 March 2017

Preacher: Devin Toh

- [0 : 0 0] Well, I've been back at work for a few weeks now, and it's really good to be back at work after a year off. But one thing that's really shocked me is how much I've just forgotten in that year.
- I've been away from work for about a year, and it feels now like I'm just starting right again from the very beginning. I've basically forgotten what tax is, which isn't very good news for my clients who pay a lot of money for me to do things for them.
- And it's partially also brought back some bad memories. I remember the first presentation I had to give when I was just starting out at the firm. I had to give a presentation on a new piece of legislation or a new law that had just been enacted.
- And there were two problems with this. So my first problem was I knew absolutely nothing about this law. I had to Google what this was. I had to Google what a tax was, and this was the answer that was on the screen.
- It even gave me a pronunciation for how to say tax, T-A-K-S. So it wasn't a good start. The second problem was that the people that I was presenting to, they were all my top bosses.
- [1 : 0 1] They were the partners, and they were the directors of the firm. And even worse than this, these people, they knew this law better, like the back of their hand. They knew it so well.
- They even advised the government on what this law should look like. So here I am, a little Asian man, trying to teach the law that I had just Googled a couple of days before to people who had a role in making the law.
- Well, suffice to say, it didn't go so well. And it even got a little bit mean, you know. They started asking me questions that I know they definitely knew the answer to, but they asked me those questions just to expose me.
- And it became so abundantly clear to them and to everyone in the room that I had prepared for that training session just by using Google and Wikipedia. And, you know, I'm normally the type of guy that can kind of fake it till I make it.
- I'm pretty good at that stuff, I think. But no, not this time. I was really, really, really embarrassing, and it just wouldn't be enough. So that's a little bit about how I feel about this passage today.
- [1 : 5 9] You know, these Pharisees come along, and they're the big dogs, you know, and they try and give Jesus a little bit of a training session on the Sabbath. I don't want to spoil the story for you guys, but it doesn't go well for these Pharisees.
- They actually, they have no idea who they are speaking to. And in response, we're going to see that Jesus has some very big things to say about the law. See, I think Jesus, what he's saying here, he's dealing with a bigger issue than just the Sabbath.
- I think he's trying to demonstrate the relationship between himself and the law. How does the coming of Jesus, how does he transform the way we see and how we understand the law?

I think that's what we're dealing with. So Luke, he's using the Sabbath as an example to make a bigger point, and that's why I think we see two Sabbath events back-to-back here in the narrative. And as we unpack the passage, we're going to be asking two questions tonight.

First question, what is Jesus' relationship to the law? And the second question, what is the real purpose of the law? All right, so let's have a look at the first one.

[3 : 05] Now, on this first Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples, they're going through the grain fields, they're picking heads of grain and they're eating them. And you've got to realize that these disciples, they are famished.

Probably they're exhausted and they're so hungry from following Jesus around and from doing ministry with him. And remember that Jesus and his disciples, they're not the richest people in the world.

So we can assume that they really, really need this food. And now, even though we know that it wasn't their grain field, they didn't own this grain field, Deuteronomy 23 actually allows people to go into a neighbor's grain field and pick grain with their hands as long as they don't sickle the grain.

What that means is, as long as they just take just what they need to get by, it's not stealing. So they're not stealing here and that's very clear, isn't it? Because the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they don't accuse Jesus of stealing here, do they?

But they accuse him of breaking the Sabbath. So this is the question, why do you think Jesus broke the Sabbath? Why? Well, in addition to God's law, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they also use this thing called the rabbinic law.

[4 : 12] And this rabbinic law, this was a standard made by the Jewish rabbis, explaining how to keep all the laws and including the Sabbath in great detail. So you need to know that this is a man-made interpretation of God's law.

It's not God's law itself. And according to this rabbinic law, people weren't allowed to go and pick grain on the Sabbath. And we see that that is exactly what they accused Jesus of doing here, don't they?

Have a look at verse 2 in your Bibles. Some of the Pharisees asked, Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath? Isn't it interesting how Jesus replies to this?

He begins, he doesn't try and justify why he's actually keeping the law, he's not breaking the law. He doesn't do that, does he? Instead, Jesus begins by revealing something about himself.

Have a look at verse 3. Jesus answered them, Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for the priests to eat.

[5 : 18] And he also gave some to his companions. Okay, so this is the thing. Why would Jesus start talking about David? Why would he do that? It kind of sounds like Jesus is a kid who just got in trouble.

He knows he's wrong, but he just kind of dabs on his friend too. He goes, Don't blame me. David did it too. Is Jesus just a cheeky kid dobbling on his mate, David?

Is he? Well, let me tell you, that's definitely not what he's doing. See, Jesus is actually saying something profound here. And this is where I think we see how the coming of Jesus, it transforms our view of the law.

See, when David was king, as king he had a measure of autonomy, he had a measure of authority to interpret the law and to waive the letter of the law for the welfare of his people.

So that's why we see Leviticus 24.9 says that this bread that David ate, this bread could only be eaten by priests since it was consecrated within the sanctuary of the temple.

[6 : 21] But you see, when the Bible says that David and his companions were hungry, their version of hungry is very different from our version of hungry. You know, our version of being hungry is, oh, had an early lunch, had some brunch maybe on a Saturday morning, and now I'm just feeling a bit peckish in the afternoon.

So, you know, I might just sneak into the temple and grab a couple of loaves. No, you've got to understand that this version of hungry, they are famished at this point. David is on the run from Saul.

They are homeless. They may not have eaten in days. That is what we're talking about here. They desperately need this bread. But you see, because David truly understood the spirit of the law, which was to provide and to care for the weak and the vulnerable, he was able to waive the strict letter of the law to achieve this greater purpose.

So they eat the consecrated bread. The letter of the law, which said that this bread can only be eaten by priests. This law is temporarily set aside for this greater purpose of preserving the lives of the people under his care.

And David could do all this because he is the king. He had a God-given authority, didn't he, to act and to rule on behalf of his people for God. So this is what Jesus is saying here.

[7 : 37] If a human king, if King David has authority to override the letter of the law, if he has it, how much more the Son of Man, the true Son of David, how much more does Jesus, the true king, have authority to override the law for the welfare of his people?

That's why Jesus says in verse 5 that the Son of Man, he's talking about himself, is the Lord of the Sabbath. He's not just the Son of Man. He's not just the king.

He's the Lord of the Sabbath. See, it's the coming of Jesus that actually transforms the way we see the law. The Pharisees, they had skewed the law. They made the law the be-all and the end-all of their relationship with God.

It was everything to them. That's why they created even more rules and more standards on top of God's law because they were so obsessed with keeping God's law perfectly because they thought that it made them right with God.

But you see, now Jesus has come, something so much better than the law is here. Jesus is saying, don't look to your right or in this case, your wrong understanding of the law to be made right with God, but look to me.

[8 : 49] Look to me, the Lord of the Sabbath. See, Jesus Christ, we know that he stands above the law, doesn't he? He's the Lord of the law because he is the one whom the law was pointing to the whole time.

See, the purpose of the law was to prepare Israel for the coming of Jesus. It was to show them who God is. It was to show them his character and it was to show them how to live in obedience to him.

And now that God himself is here with us, we don't look to the Sabbath anymore, but we look to the Lord of the Sabbath. See, the law was actually never meant to sustain our relationship with God.

It was never meant to do that. But the law was actually meant to point to the Lord Jesus who truly does give us a relationship with God. And now that Jesus is here, he's saying, I am all you need.

You look to me. You know, some of my friends, they have recently been embracing this gluten-free lifestyle. And it makes me really sorry for the people that have very real health reasons for going gluten-free because of celiac disease.

[9 : 56] And I feel sorry for you guys because my friends, they've made your lives actually very difficult, haven't they? See, it's people like my friends who aren't actually allergic to gluten or anything sensible like that, but they have gotten it into their minds that they are healthier if they stay away from gluten.

And that's fine, right? Fair enough. Each to their own. They can do that. Whether I agree on the real health benefits of doing that or not, good on them for wanting to be healthier. But it's actually getting very difficult to have dinner with them.

You know, because not only are they going gluten-free, they're going dairy-free, and now they're going sugar-free. They're doing the Holy Trinity of free whatever. See, they've become so rigid in their dietary restrictions that they can't share food with me anymore.

I have to cook with all these strange ingredients for them now. It's becoming really difficult. They're feeling like they're my Pharisees. But that would kind of make me Jesus, so... They're not my Pharisees.

But you can just tell that it's really hurting my heart, isn't it? See, they've missed the point, haven't they? In trying to be healthy, they've made it all about dietary restrictions, even when they don't have any real allergies.

[11 : 06] I don't know where this madness will end, you know? They've become so wrapped up in gluten-free, dairy-free, sugar-free prison, they've almost forgotten why they've done this all in the first place, which was actually for a healthier lifestyle.

And it's actually the same thing here. See, the Pharisees, they're getting so caught up in keeping the law that they have forgotten God. They were so obsessed with their rules and their regulations that they actually missed Jesus, the whole point of what the law was about in the first place.

And it's funny, isn't it? The Lord is standing in front of them the whole time, and they have no idea who they're speaking to. Now, this doesn't mean that we completely disregard God's law now.

It's not that we don't care about God's law, but we look to Jesus now. And because of that, what we find is we actually obey God's commands better than we even did before. Because now this obedience is out of a relationship.

It's not out of an obligation to just follow a set of rules. And we know this too, don't we? There are some people in our lives we know we would drop anything for.

[12 : 12] We would drop anything to help that person out. We would inconvenience ourselves so much just to serve them. Not because we're forced to, but it's the strength of the relationship that I have with these people that compels me to serve them.

And you'll find with these people, it's done out of joy, isn't it? We're glad to do it. It's not out of duty. It's the same with Jesus. As we receive him as the Lord of the Sabbath, following him, following his words, actually will become a deep joy in your heart.

It will not be an obedience based on slavery. All right, so we've seen Jesus' relationship to the law, that he is the Lord of the law. And now we're going to ask ourselves this next question.

What is the real purpose of the law? So what Luke does is he takes us to another Sabbath day. Jesus is in the synagogue and there's a man with a shriveled right hand.

You can kind of imagine it, can't you? Jesus is teaching and the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they're probably at the back of the room ready to criticize, maybe where Andrew Price is right now. It's all right, I'll get seven feet back off you later.

[13 : 24] And we see, and we see that they're armed with an accusation, aren't they? Have a look at verse 7. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.

So they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. Again, we see the accusation, it's about working on the Sabbath, isn't it? But this time, it's just, it's getting ridiculous.

See, under this Sabbath, under their rabbinic law, you couldn't do anything on the Sabbath except for in life-threatening situations. So a shriveled right hand, it wouldn't have fallen into this category.

It's not a life-threatening situation. So if Jesus were to heal him, the Pharisees would accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. You can just see how crazy this is, can't you?

It's so much of a distortion from the purpose of God's law. And Jesus, he's onto this in a flash. I'll read on from verse 8. See, Jesus is saying here that the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, they had completely missed the point of the law, haven't they?

[14 : 51] They've missed the true purpose of the law. Because let's just think a little bit more about the Sabbath. You know, in the book of Genesis, God creates the world in six days. And then on the seventh day, what God does is he rests from this work of creation.

And you see, the actual work week, it was never actually meant to cycle back to day one. Actually, this seventh day of rest was supposed to go on forever.

Not because God didn't want to do anything on a Sunday night, or sorry, on a Monday, or because he just doesn't like to work, but because he had finished creating. God said it was good.

And on this seventh day, God wouldn't just do nothing, would he? But he would continue to sustain the earth. He would continue to provide for the earth. And more importantly, he would begin to enjoy his creation and enjoy his relationship with these humans he had created in his own image.

And for us humans, the purpose of the Sabbath was to then enjoy God, to enjoy his creation in obedience and love to him. And as we saw in that first Old Testament reading today, what God does then is in his law, he sets aside one day of the week and he calls it the Sabbath to not work.

[16 : 08] So that we can remember this seventh day, this day of rest. See, if you look at it, the Sabbath was never a day just to do nothing, was it?

But it was actually a day to remember that we were created by God and for God. To remember that life is not all about work, but life is all about God.

See, the Pharisees, they had it so wrong, didn't they? They thought that the Sabbath was about doing nothing. But actually, the Sabbath is about God. Remembering God, enjoying his creation, it's about doing good.

And if you think about that, that is the broader purpose of the whole law, isn't it? You know, often we think of the law as a restriction. We think of the law as a list of rules that just wants to destroy our fun.

But Jesus is saying that the law was actually here to give you a true freedom. It was supposed to actually lead to human flourishing. That's what the Sabbath does, isn't it?

[17 : 08] God gives us a day of rest so that we can enjoy him. It's pretty good. It's pretty good. God gave the law so that we could actually experience true freedom. See, the law is the right restrictions in life that actually leads us to a greater freedom.

Think about the purpose of a diet because I just can't get my friends out of my head. See, under the right restrictions, maybe, you know, cutting back on some junk food, you know, limiting some carbs, which is hard for Asians to do.

But you see, with the right restrictions, it actually leads us to the greater freedom of long-term health. So it's some wise and some wise restrictions now actually pushing us to a greater freedom.

That's the purpose of the law. It's the presence of the right restrictions that actually leads us to a deeper joy. And Jesus is saying here that the purpose of the law is actually to give life.

That's why the Sabbath would actually compel us to provide for the weak and for the hungry. That the law truly seeks the welfare of the lame and of the crippled. So this is what Jesus does.

[18 : 18] Have a look at verse 10. He looked around at them all and then said to the man, stretch out your hand. He did so. And his hand was completely restored.

The purpose of the Sabbath is to give life. It's not to take life. So Jesus heals the man. Why? Because not only is Jesus the Lord of the law, but Jesus is also the Lord of life.

He is the one who gives life here, doesn't he? He restores this man's crippled hand. And we know that even for us, Jesus has, the Lord has truly given us life, hasn't he?

Because the real problem with the law was never that it was bad. The real problem with the law was that humans could never keep it like Jesus could. And because of that, there is a punishment that comes with breaking God's law.

And that punishment is death. But you see, what Jesus does is he steps in, doesn't he? And he saves us. How does he do that? He does it by taking the punishment of the law on himself.

[19 : 25] Jesus was crucified on a cross that we deserved. He died on that cross and stood condemned by the law in our place instead of us.

So that now, we can receive new life in him. And we know this because Jesus is not just Lord of the law, but he is the Lord of life. And if you're here today, if you don't know Jesus, you need to look to him.

You need to trust in him, believing that he died for our sins so that we could receive a new life in him. And as you do that, we are actually brought into a relationship with God and we are destined to have eternal life.

We need to believe in this Lord, don't we, who gives us eternal life. Contrast that with the Pharisees who don't give life, do they? They are actually the ones who do evil.

They destroy life on the Sabbath. Verse 11 says that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and they began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. They completely missed the point, haven't they?

[20 : 32] And more than that, their hearts have been so exposed here. So all of this begs the question, on what do you base your relationship with God on? The answer is obvious.

It needs to be Jesus. It cannot be the law. Very easy to say. But when you really examine your heart, it's very easy to say and it's actually very, very hard to do because the default setting of the human heart is legalism.

We are so prone to just following a set of rules, aren't we? So we feel like, oh, you know, we're making God really happy because we read our Bible every day. We think we're pleasing God because we don't swear in public or because we do these nice little Christian things.

We even come to church every week. We even do Bible studies all the time. Don't get me wrong. These are all good things, aren't they, that we should be doing? But they are terrible substitutes for a real relationship with God.

You know, it's so easy to hide behind Christian practice. It's so easy to hide behind just serving at church. And people will look at you and they will assume that your life is going great.

[21 : 40] Your relationship with God is going well because you're serving. But is that the reality? You know, I'm not immune from this struggle at all. I'm no different. Actually, what I'm finding is the hardest thing about ministry is that I can easily fake a relationship with God.

It's so easy. You know, people look at me and think, you know, you must have a really good relationship with God because you go to Bible college. You go to a Bible college. Oh, Devin, you go to a Bible college.

You work in ministry, you're just around church so much. But this is the danger, isn't it? Often I find I'm doing these things. These things are good things to do. But I often so forget that I'm saved by Christ alone.

I tend to base my identity on what I'm doing for God rather than in God himself. But knowing that it's Jesus alone who saves us, knowing that it is the Lord of life who saves us, knowing this, it actually drives us to experience a true freedom.

God doesn't love you because you're a good bloke. God doesn't love you because you're able to execute a set of rules very well. He loves you because he loves you.

[22 : 52] It's nothing more than that. And once you realize that, it's very, very freeing, isn't it? Because no longer does my sin and my failure cripple me. God doesn't love me any less because I sin.

He loves me because he loves me. Romans 5.8, which is on the screen, says that God demonstrates his own love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And when you understand that Jesus is the Lord of life, following God's law actually becomes a delight. We obey God's law now with the security that we are already saved.

So obeying God's law is not about getting right with God. It's not about proving anything to him. But it helps me to enjoy God more, knowing he's already brought me near. God's law. So for instance, even though the Old Testament law, the Sabbath, has been fulfilled in Jesus, there's still heaps of wisdom, isn't there, in taking a day off work a week and devoting it to God.

So it might mean for you guys deliberately not taking any shifts on a Sunday. For me, it means because I often work on Sundays, which is, so I need to actually set aside Saturday as a day to do, as to rest and not get amongst the books, that is actually really hard for me to do right now.

[24 : 14] But you see, God has commanded us to rest in him, not to make us poor and miserable, but for our good, that we would enjoy Jesus more, that we would enjoy each other more.

Do you see how freeing the law actually becomes when you realize that God already loves you, that he's doing this now for our good, even when we don't obey it perfectly?

All right, so when you come to church, there's nothing more for you to prove here, is there? You don't need to come here looking like you have it all together, like you keep God's laws perfectly, because we know you don't.

I know I don't. Actually, if you saw the state of my heart, you might be very surprised to find something you don't like. But the good news is, is that God, he's not surprised, is he?

Because it's Jesus alone. It's the Lord of the Sabbath who can make you right with God. The law can't do it. You can't do it. Let Jesus do only what Jesus can do.

[25 : 15] He is the Lord of life. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus, who has completely transformed what it means to have a relationship with you.

Thank you that we don't get, that we don't need to get bogged down, we don't need to obsess over obeying your law. Thank you that we can just look to Jesus and know that we are 100% secure in a relationship with you.

We pray that this would grow our hearts and our affection for you, Lord, that we would be compelled out of love to serve you as the treasure that you are. We love you so much.

In Jesus' name. Amen.