

# Lord and Leader

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The first 16 verses, which we'll read just now, it's on page 1033. Luke chapter 6.

1 Sabbath, Jesus was going through the corn fields, and his disciples began to pick some ears of corn, rub them in their hands and eat the grain. Some of the Pharisees asked, why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath? 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 priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions. Then Jesus said to them, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

On another Sabbath, he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 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. But Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said to the man with the shriveled hand, get up and stand in front of everyone.

So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? He looked round at them all and then said to the man, stretch out your hand. He did so, and his hand was completely restored. But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to do evil. And then Jesus said to them, what they might do to Jesus. One of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them, whom he also designated apostles. Simon, whom he named Peter, his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon, who was called the zealot, Judas, son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. This is the Word of God. Now this morning, we're looking at these 16 verses as we continue through our 50 sermon mega series, looking through the whole of Luke's gospel over this year. We're taking a year to look at the life of Jesus. Now Luke's gospel, it's a historical narrative account collected by a medical doctor called Luke, who did a lot of research into eyewitness accounts of what Jesus said and did. Last Sunday, we were looking at Luke 5, the previous chapter, where Luke records Jesus calling the disciples to follow him and to centre their lives on him. Today, we're looking at Luke 6, where Jesus starts to proclaim, to declare that he is Lord. And as Lord, in a way that relates to you, in two ways, in your life balance of work and rest and in your attitude to the church.

And we've got those and we're looking at them under two headings. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and Jesus is Lord of the church. We're going to start with the first of those. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.

[ 3 : 4 5 ]     We're looking at verses 1 to 10 and we're going to go straight into the text, verses 1 and 2. One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the cornfields and as disciples began to pick some ears of corn, rub them in their hands and eat the grain. Some of the Pharisees asked, why are you doing what?

What is unlawful on the Sabbath? So we have Jesus and his disciples and they're walking through a field on the Sabbath day, they're hungry, they take some ears of corn, they rub them together to get the kernels out and they start to eat them. And then this other group, the Pharisees come along and they accuse them of doing something illegal. And right away we see that we need to set the scene here contextually because there are all these questions that jump out at us. What is the Sabbath day, for example? What is this all about? And to answer that, to set the scene, we have to go right back to the beginning of the Old Testament, to the Bible's account of God's creating the universe.

It's in the first book of the Bible, in Genesis, in the first two chapters. And in those two chapters, God's creative work is structured in a pattern of six days of intense busyness, followed by Him stopping working and on the seventh day He rests. So in Genesis 2, 1-3, which I'll read for you, thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the work He had been doing. So on the seventh day He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done. These words are key. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. The example that God sets is that He works for six days and rests for one. And you say maybe, well, why does God need to rest for a day? Was God tired? And the answer is no, that's not why God rested. He didn't rest because He was tired. He doesn't get tired. That's the point. He's God. We read in Genesis that He stopped working because His work was finished. And that's key. That's different. The heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the work He was doing. So on the seventh day He rested. You see, in the Bible, God is a God who is secure in who He is and what He does and has done. He has this basic security in His identity whereby He knows who God is and He knows that His work is perfect so He can set out to do His work.

He can then complete the task and then rest because there's nothing else to do. There's nothing that can be added when God has done what He set out to do and then does it and says it is finished.

Nothing else to add, nothing else that can be done. And because of that, the God of the Bible is a God of rest, a God of Sabbath, of peace, of completion. And His default mode is that He's not the God of constant, frantic, insecure kind of activity where He's endlessly working to try and define who He is and accomplish His goals as though they're impossible and He just can't get there. That's not who God is or how He operates. And because God is a God who has this basic secure state of rest, because His identity is secure, He is God, no questions about it, and His work is done. You know, He set out to create this perfect universe and He did it. And then when He was done, He rested.

[ 7 : 34 ]      God wants His people to reflect that in their lives, in the balance between work and rest. And you see that in the fourth commandment in Exodus 20, which I'll read for you.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your man servant or maid servant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that's in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Now again, we're setting the context and we're filling in the background to all of this that's happening in Luke 6. The context of the fourth commandment is the Exodus. It's where the people, the Israelite people, the people of God were slaves in Egypt, and they were working constant 24-7 backbreaking work for the Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, when God intervened and He took them out of Egypt and took them away from slavery and made them free. You know, one thing that makes a slave a slave is that a slave never gets a day off. A slave never has a day where he ceases to be a slave. You're always a slave. But God takes his people away from slavery and one of the priorities for them is a day of rest, a day off work instead of a day of work. He frees them from their slavery. And one of His commandments is take a day of rest because now you belong to me.

Your identity is now in me and it's secure. I will provide for you. So God wants his people to take a day of rest and to remember what He's done for them. So that's the background to this whole idea of Sabbath, of the Sabbath day. By the time of Jesus, Jewish law has been developing and adding this whole raft of other rules about how the Sabbath should be kept. And that's where the Pharisees come into the picture because they're like the religious thought police of the day who have, you know, 101 other rules that God didn't give about how you should keep the Sabbath by doing this and not doing that. If you want to get a flavor of this in modern-day times, the modern-day equivalent would be, I guess, the direct descendants of the Phariseeical Judaism and modern observance, Orthodox Judaism, where they have loads of rules about how you can break the Sabbath or how you can keep it. For example, on the Sabbath a mother cannot push a pram that her child is in because pushing is an act of work. Even if you're going to the synagogue, you know, you cannot push a pram.

It's pushing is work, which I think is a bit bizarre. I'm not a mother, obviously, but if I had small children, you know, it seems like it would be a lot more work to have to carry them rather than push them in a pram. It's just this kind of loads of extra rules, that system, and that's what you find with the Pharisees. They have that kind of a mindset. All these man-made rules to be kept to a T if you're not to break the Sabbath. And one of the rules was that you cannot pick the ears of corn on the Sabbath. They had a group of 39 rules called the halacha, and this is one of those rules. No picking ears of corn, even if you're hungry. It's better to starve than to break their rules.

And they have this very harsh legalistic take on Sabbath keeping with all these extra rules, and we find Jesus encountering them. And he answers them in verse three. 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 forth his loveless only for priests to eat, and he also gave some to his companions. Then Jesus said to them, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. When Jesus meets loveless, joyless, legalistic, Sabbath enforcing Pharisees, he does not respond by saying, you guys are such a bunch of killjoys with your Sabbath. And anyway, I am here to do away with the Sabbath. The Sabbath is gone. It's finished. We're going to do whatever we want. He doesn't say that. He, in fact, he says, I am Lord of the Sabbath. A huge claim. It implies two things. Firstly, that Jesus is all about Sabbath keeping. Secondly, that Sabbath keeping is all about Jesus. Well, unpack those. Jesus is all about Sabbath keeping and saying that he's Lord of the Sabbath to these guys in response to their legalism and all their extra rules. He's saying something like this. You guys cannot claim that I'm breaking Sabbath rules because I wrote those rules. I invented the Sabbath. I'm Lord of it. It's mine. And I didn't write the rule that you're saying I've broken. I don't recognize it. Of course I keep the Sabbath. I invented it.

[ 12 : 40 ] Now, let that sink in for a second. Jesus keeps the Sabbath because he is Lord of the Sabbath, because he invented the Sabbath. And this presents a huge challenge to us because in our society, some of us individually, because Jesus is very much into Sabbath keeping, but proper Sabbath keeping, not this farceical nonsense with all their extra rules. He's into Sabbath keeping because the Sabbath belongs to him. For some of us, that's a real challenge because in Sundays, we act as though Jesus had said, yeah, the Sabbath, forget about it. It's gone. It's a thing of the past.

Do whatever pleases you on the Sabbath. You know, go to church, but apart from that, do whatever you want. Do whatever work you want. Get whoever you want to work for you. The Sabbath is no more. And the problem is that Jesus did not say that. He said that the Sabbath still goes on and even more that it belongs to him. And the question for us is, is Jesus your Lord?

Important question number one. If so, is he the Lord of your Sabbath? That's the question. Do you have the kind of work rest balance that a disciple of Jesus should have if he says there's a proper way to live on the Sabbath as a Christian, which he exemplifies in his own life? And you ignore it.

There's a basic part of your Christianity that's being un-Christ like. It's a serious problem. Jesus is all about Sabbath keeping. And then conversely, Sabbath keeping is all about Jesus.

The deep controversy in his claim here to be the Lord of the Sabbath is that God is the Lord of the Sabbath. It was as we've read it before, we read it for a reason in Genesis that God set aside the seventh day, blessed it, made it holy. God is the Lord of the Sabbath. So Jesus is coming along saying, I am the Lord of the Sabbath. He's saying that he is God here in the flesh.

[ 14 : 57 ] You know, the fourth commandment, which this all goes back to is that the Sabbath is a Sabbath to the Lord. And Jesus is standing there saying, Hello, it's me. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath.

Your Sabbath should be directed towards worshiping me. And you're using it to criticize me and to say that I'm breaking the rules that I wrote when I'm not. If he's Lord of the Sabbath, he is God.

And you've got to focus your entire life in the whole of your life pattern in your balance between work and rest and your worship. Everything has to center on him. So he makes this claim. He says he's Lord of the Sabbath. And then Luke records Jesus showing that he's Lord of the Sabbath.

On another Sabbath, he went into the synagogue and was teaching. And a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. Now take note, Jesus uses the Sabbath as a day to worship God, goes to the synagogue.

When he goes there, there's a man with a deformed hand and the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law watching him to see if he'll break their Sabbath rules. And Jesus heals this man. Now what's important to see is again, not that Jesus is saying the Sabbath doesn't matter. He's not doing this kind of flying in the face of the Sabbath keeping rules. He's doing this because it is a way to keep the Sabbath. This kind of work of mercy, of healing. He's showing us how the Sabbath should be kept.

[ 16 : 29 ] He puts God first in the day. He goes to the synagogue to worship God. And he puts others second by mercifully healing this man. There's no, in his approach to the Sabbath day, there's no sense of, you know, look at me and how austere I am in frowning all day and denying myself pleasures because it's the Sabbath, you know, like the Pharisees did, nor is there the opposite of look at me doing whatever I want because I'm free in that kind of selfish resting way.

You don't find either of those with Jesus. What you find is Jesus who was happy to use the Sabbath as a day for rest and for worship to be refocused on God and to be a servant to others. And the application for us is to do the same, to use the Sabbath as a gospel day. It's great that we are all here worshiping God together. But the question then becomes, how do you use the rest of today, this day, once we leave the building? We need to use this day as a day of spiritual rest.

Rest is essential. If you don't get sleep, you won't survive. You know, sleep is essential to life. And let's say you need eight hours of sleep for every 24 hour day to get properly rested.

If you try and make up those eight hours in 20 minute catnaps throughout the day, you never get more than 20 minutes at a time, it won't work because rest does not work like that.

Sleep, you know, you need to sleep for a big block of hours. You need to go through the pattern of resting or falling into the light sleep, deep sleep, REM sleep, the whole cycle. And it needs to come in a block because rest in tiny little moments and pockets doesn't work. It does not give you rest. With spiritual rest, it's the same. One hour in church on a Saturday morning is great.

[ 18 : 28 ] And it's essential, but it won't give you adequate spiritual rest because it's only one hour a week when there are 168 hours in the whole week. God did not say, for 167 hours, you shall work and do all your labor labor. And then for one hour, you shall rest. He didn't say that. He said six days on one day off, have a Sabbath for the whole day, because you cannot get all of your spiritual rest in a moment. You need a day. And that's a big challenge for us, for our day and age, you know, because of the context that we live in. We're post industrial. We've departed from the notion, for example, that, you know, you follow your father's profession, and that's your job and your identity from the moment you're born. We generally don't do that in the West. We've created a world where you can be whatever you want to be. You choose, you choose your job, and you choose your identity.

And you know how closely those things go together now in our mindset when you meet someone new question one, what's your name in question two, what do you do? You know, your identity is what is you choose it. And having made that choice of what your profession and identity will be, you work, and you work, and you work, and you work to establish yourself in your chosen profession, running around like a headless chicken, trying to secure your identity. And it's the polar opposite of who God is in his identity and in his work, because God knows who he is. He knows his identity. He's God, and he finishes his task, and he's able to rest. But the thing is, we live in this world. I mean, that's why so many of you are here in Edinburgh doing degrees, where, you know, you're forming your identity, and you're working and working and working to try and get those letters after your name. And then once you've got them, you then start the whole process over again, working and working and working to get that identity. If you're a Christian, you don't need to do that. You don't need to have that, you know, the temptation to think that you are defined by your career. Your job title is the sum of your parts or your academic qualification, whether you've got a first or a two one or whatever, you know, that is what defines me. So I have to give 24 seven efforts to try and make my identity what I wanted to be or your wage bracket, you know, constantly working without any rest, because you think that your identity is in how much money you have in the bank. If you're a Christian, your identity is defined by Jesus according to grace, you know, justification by faith alone. And when you start to have that mindset, your work-life balance changes to be consistent with having Jesus as the Lord of rest, the Lord of the Sabbath for you. Jesus identity was bound up in God, and he kept the Sabbath special because of that.

We live in an age of really radical self-absorbing. We live in a capitalist society, which, which instills presuppositions in you from the moment you're born to believe that, that I am the most important person in the world, you know, in terms of yourself, not like everyone's race to believe that I am, you know, it's that you believe that you are from the moment you're born.

You see it in the way that we raise our kids, they're constantly entertained. There's never a moment where, you know, it's not just constant entertainment, gratification, pleasure, because that is the goal of life. And it's to please yourself, to put yourself first, so that even when you rest, it's expected to be a kind of me-focused rest. That, that when I'm resting, it's that I'm not working, but I'm still being pleased, and it's all self-directed. And if other people are having to work to provide that me-focused rest, that's fine, because I am number one. And that's not what you find with Jesus. His rest is not me-focused. It's God-focused, and then it's other person-focused, neighbor-focused. You know, that's why, for example, in the fourth commandment, it restricts economic activity on the Sabbath, because it's not about me-focused rest. Keeping the Sabbath special is so important for your spiritual growth, precisely because it works to rob you of your self-absorption, and instead makes you a Jesus-absorbed person. For people like us raised in a capitalist society to grow as Christians, we really need to discover and love the Sabbath work-rest balance for that reason. Now, at this point in the passage, Jesus is giving these absolute claims about himself, that he's God, and that your life has to change because of that, and it's work-left balance. And the Pharisees cannot handle this, so they plot how they can kill him. They want him dead.

Mark's account of this incident is interesting. It says that the Pharisees and the Herodians got together to plot how they could kill Jesus, and you know, that didn't happen. Those people hated each other. Normally, they would never come together, but they did in response to Jesus, but they want Jesus dead, and Jesus, in claiming to be God, wants nothing less than total world domination. And his plan to do that is through the church of which he is Lord and Head, and you see that plan unfolding throughout the rest of the New Testament as the church spreads under the leadership of a group of men called the Apostles, and this chapter is where Jesus appoints them and asserts that he is the Lord of the church. Now, we're looking at verses 12 to 16 briefly.

[ 24 : 42 ] The Apostles, they're overwhelmingly important to the Christian faith. They wrote the bulk of the New Testament. It was them that led the early churches spread throughout the known world. If you don't think the Apostles and their writings are important, you need to think again.

Because Jesus chose them deliberately and prayerfully, as in verse 12, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer to God about this issue, serious prayer. Jesus did not choose the Apostles lightly.

And then in verse 13, morning comes, he calls the disciples to him. He chooses 12 of them, and he names them. He designates them Apostles. This is really significant as well. Apostle means a sent person. They are Jesus chosen ambassadors and emissaries, witnesses. Now, at this point, I want you to imagine that you have a message which you believe will change the world forever.

And you have to pick 12 people who will be responsible for spreading that message, for supporting your work, and who will take your work all over the world. Who would you pick?

What kind of people would you pick? If it was me, I would try and pick a group of people who are charismatic leaders, who are highly educated, who have financial clout to get the work done, because, you know, it costs a lot of money to change the world. I would pick people who have considerable experience in international leadership positions. I would pick people who have impeccable temperaments, who all get on as a group. And yet look at the men that Jesus deliberately and prayerfully chooses. Simon, whom he named Peter, a fisherman from, you know, an unfashionable galley. He has no formal education. He has no social clout. He has a very impulsive temperament.

[ 26 : 36 ] His brother Andrew, again another fisherman. James, John, Philip, Bartholomew. Most of whom are so unspectacular that we know almost nothing about them. Matthew, a tax collector, someone who had previously sold out his own people in the most astonishing disloyalty, because he loved money.

He sold out his own people to work as a tax collector for the occupying Roman army. He was hated by his own people. Then you have Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus. Simon, who was called the zealot. Simon the zealot is a political religious terrorist. He is an ultra nationalist, a member of the zealot group. He carries weapons. Then you have Judas, son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Jesus is the supremely good judge of human character, and he deliberately chooses Judas Iscariot, a traitor, to be one of the twelve. Even through the Gospels, you can always, you can see that Judas is suspicious, you know. He's just too concerned with money, and he stands out, and yet Jesus picks him nonetheless. Now how, how are you going to take over the world with a bunch of illiterate fishermen, a sellout, a fanatical nationalist, and a disloyal traitor?

How can these be the men that Jesus chooses and designates apostles? Now, even though we're not, maybe not aware of it all that much, Christianity has had such a huge impact on our Western outlook and culture. It has embedded itself so deeply within our culture.

There's a thing that, kind of, social philosophers and theologians call it cultural meta narrative. It's the big story that lies underneath all the other stories we tell, and from which all these other stories develop and grow. And for us, Christianity, the Gospel, it has had such an enormous impact that it is our cultural meta narrative from which you have all these other stories that grow, where all the stories of our culture come from in one way or another, which, for example, Hollywood constantly apes and mimics, which the novels we read borrow from stories of heroes and redeemers of liberation, of one person dying to save another, stories of unlikely heroes. For example, when I was young, when I was in primary school, there was a film that I loved called The Mighty Ducks, about an ice hockey team, and there are a bunch of ragtag no-hopers, and this brilliant coach gets left with the team, and then they end up becoming world champions. And it's the kind of story that resonates with us. We love that. We love the unlikely hero because our, kind of, baseline cultural meta narrative is of the unlikely hero in Jesus Christ. If you were going to pick the Savior of the world, the Son of God, surely He would not be Jesus because Jesus is someone who took on every single limitation you could imagine and still conquered the world. He was, you know, a Jew born in dubious social circumstances, in a barn, never married or children, never wrote a book, never had much money, was homeless for a period in his life. He lived before the era of global mass media, no formal education, never photographed or filmed, devoted his life to being nothing. He was executed by crucifixion, and yet still this most unlikely of messiahs is the Savior. It's the one who will transform and redeem the cosmos. And not only did he take these personal limitations on himself, look at the selection he makes for his apostles, even to the point of deliberately choosing to incorporate

Judas Iscariot, a traitor, into his select group. And yet with these guys, he still manages to spread his message all over the world and to take things to the point they are now where the majority of the world's population would profess that this Jesus Christ is the Son of God and they would worship Him as so. It's like Jesus relishes stacking all the odds up against himself from our human perspective, and he says, what do odds matter? I am Jesus. I uphold the universe by my powerful word. Of course, I can conquer the world as this Jew born in the back of beyond who was accompanied by this ragtag bunch of apostles. And that is why we should want to worship and love Jesus because he can come from nowhere and end up everywhere. He can come from such obscurity and he can hide his glory. He can veil it constantly in the guise of defeat and humility and he can end up being proclaimed as the King of Kings. Amen. I'm going to pray briefly and then we're going to sing praise to God for this. Our Lord and our Father, we thank you so much for the gospel. We thank you for Jesus as Lord of all. We thank you that he is Lord of the Sabbath and we pray that today on the Sabbath day that we will be rested by finding our rest in you.

[ 32 : 38 ] And we pray for you to bless us and to lead us to keep this day special out of gratitude because of grace. And we also pray for you to help us to see the greatness of Jesus in his own humility and limitations he took on himself and also that we would see his glory through your church spread by the apostles and still full of ordinary limited sinful people like ourselves. Amen.