

**Color Me Blue****Luke 6:1-11**

How many of you remember the days of Blue Laws?

How many of you don't know what Blue Laws are? For those of you who don't know what Blue Laws are or you need a refresher let me offer this definition from Wikipedia: A blue law is a type of law designed to restrict or ban some or all Sunday shopping for religious standards, particularly the observance of a day of worship or rest. Blue laws date as far back as 17<sup>th</sup> century. Southern and mid-western states passed numerous laws to protect Sunday during the mid to late 19th century. These Sunday laws enacted at the state and local levels would sometimes carry penalties for doing non-religious activities on Sunday as part of an effort to enforce religious observance and church attendance. Numerous people were arrested for playing cards, baseball, and even fixing wagon wheels on Sunday.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld blue laws as constitutional numerous times due to secular reasoning, even though the origin of blue laws were for religious purposes. In its landmark case, *McGowan vs. Maryland* (1961), the Supreme Court ruled that Maryland's blue laws violated neither the Free Exercise Clause nor the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. It approved the state's blue law restricting commercial activities on Sunday, noting that while such laws originated to encourage attendance at Christian churches, the contemporary Maryland laws were intended to serve "to provide a uniform day of rest for all citizens" on a secular basis and to promote the secular values of "health, safety, recreation, and general well-being" through a common day of rest. That this day coincides with Christian Sabbath is not a bar to the state's secular goals; it neither reduces its effectiveness for secular purposes nor prevents adherents of other religions from observing their own holy days.

Today States have rescinded most blue laws leaving it up to the individual business as to whether or not it will remain open on Sunday. For example,

owned by a Christian, Hobby Lobby is not open on Sunday but Bronners which is also owned by Christians, is open. Just down the road from where we live is the Cobblestone Restaurant, which is not open on Sunday.

**Is it right or wrong?**

**Should we shop or work or do other activities outside of church on Sunday?**

**How about all these seasonal little league sporting events that are now played on Sunday?**

Eric Liddell, a devout Christian, known as the flying Scotsman refused to participate in sports on Sunday and declined running the 100 meter dash in the Olympics choosing to run the 400 meter instead, a race he had never run. While defensive end Reggie White, also a devout Christian, chose to play football on Sunday as a platform for his faith.

Before we look at our passage in Luke, let's begin by going back to the beginning to understand what the Sabbath is all about.

**Genesis 2:2-3**

From this passage it is very clear that God placed a premium on a day of rest, a day to be honored, and a day He declared to be holy.

We find the first use of the word Sabbath in **Exodus 16:23**.

The Israelites had just escaped from the iron clutches of Egypt and were on their way to the Promised Land. God promised to provide manna for them in their wandering. It would be sent each day for six days. Each day they were to gather what they needed for the day but on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much so that they would have what they needed for the seventh day or the Sabbath. It was to be a day of rest. Now the root word for Sabbath means to cease from work. They were to prepare on the sixth day what they would eat on the Sabbath so that they would not have to work on the Sabbath. But there were some who

didn't listen and they went out on the Sabbath and found nothing.

We come to the word Sabbath again in **Exodus 20:8-11** found among the 10 Commandments given to Israel to obey.

The principle of the Sabbath was also given to the land that it too was to receive rest every 7<sup>th</sup> year.

Let me ask you some questions to ponder.

**Do you make sure you have a rest each Sunday?**  
**Do you intentionally focus on God each Sunday?**  
**Do you think God would be pleased with how you spent your Sundays?**

I am going to intentionally use Sabbath and Sunday interchangeably, even though there is a Biblical distinction, but will clarify where necessary. What is permitted and what is not permitted to do on a Sunday has been a hot topic for Christians for many centuries. In fact, it was a hot topic for Jews since the command to observe the Sabbath was initiated nearly 3500 years ago. This morning we want to consider a time when Jesus had a run in with the Pharisees about this very issue.

Turn to our main text in **Luke 6:1-11**.

An innocent activity is questioned  
 An intelligent answer is given  
 An improper accusation is devised  
 An intentional assertion is made  
 An irrational anger is expressed

## **I. AN INNOCENT ACTIVITY IS QUESTIONED – v. 1-2**

**How would you like it if the motive behind everything you did was questioned?** It would get old fast. Everything Jesus did or said was put under the Pharisaical microscope to see if it stood up to their traditions, their laws.

Once again they question the activity of Jesus' disciples. It was the Sabbath and He along with His disciples were walking along in some field and were hungry. What comes natural when you are hungry? You find something to eat. Now if I'm hungry I go to the jar of peanuts and grab a few or reach for the bag of Nilla Wafers or some fish crackers. Eating is a normal, daily part of life. So it was convenient for them to reach out while they were strolling along with Jesus and pick some grain, rub it in their hands to separate the grain from the shell and eat it.

But once again the Pharisees are relentless at looking over everything Jesus did or said to attack and accuse. They immediately question Jesus about their activity and its unlawfulness. **“Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”**

They were claiming that what the disciples did was a violation of the law. In their opinion they were working. Remember, the Pharisees were the guardians of the Law. Now let's understand something here, because the Pharisees were claiming that they were working on the Sabbath. To understand the word work is to understand the key to what is and is not lawful on the Sabbath. But we also need to bear in mind that it isn't necessarily the absence of work that makes the Sabbath day holy. God had declared the day holy from the beginning. Keep in mind here that we are talking about the Sabbath or Saturday.

There are several words in the Hebrew for work. The one used in Genesis when God ceased from work is the same word used in the commandment and means occupation. It's the work or occupation from which you gain a living. Reading through Exodus we find a number of things considered as work like not making a fire or gathering wood, not cooking, not trading or harvesting.

**One author wrote: “The Jews were so keen not to defile the Sabbath that they put fences up around their lives to prevent them from coming near them.**

**They formed definitions of work, carrying loads even walking.”** From the earliest rabbinical writings they created 39 categories of acts they considered work that were forbidden on the Sabbath. From those 39 categories they developed 24 chapters in the Talmud to further define what was meant. They tinkered with the law and found ways to get around them.

Here is a sampling of some of those regulations. You were not allowed to walk further than a Sabbath's day journey. That was equivalent to 3,000 yards. They circumvented the law by putting enough food for 2 meals at the 3,000 yard mark, camping out overnight so that it would become their temporary residence to allow them to walk an additional 3,000 yards. They even taught that if you were walking on the Sabbath, you could only go so many steps at which time you had to stop and pray before you could proceed.

They considered lifting anything heavier than a dried fig as being work.

If a man was carrying fruit when the Sabbath began he had to drop the fruit wherever he was standing.

Rabbis forbade a woman from looking in a mirror on the Sabbath lest she should see a gray hair and pluck it out, which was considered work.

You could not filter undrinkable water to make it drinkable.

A scribe could not carry a pen.  
A teacher could not carry a book.  
A tailor could not carry a needle.

You couldn't bathe on the Sabbath because water spilled on the floor was considered washing it.

You could not move a chair across a dirt floor because the legs of the chair might leave furrows, which was considered plowing.

The law that forbade starting a fire on the Sabbath has been taken to mean by some Jews today that you cannot drive your car, because a combustible engine ignites fuel and makes a fire.

Today you can't turn a light on or off, so they either leave certain lights on or use a timer.

Last week it was about keeping ceremonies.  
This week it is about keeping the Sabbath.

The religious leaders defined and redefined and codified the law and made it burdensome in the process. To consider what the disciples did and determine if it was actually breaking the law we need to go back to the Old Testament.

### **Deuteronomy 23:25**

According to that verse, there was nothing wrong with what the disciples did. The Sabbath was meant to be a blessing, but they had turned it into a burden. The Pharisees considered what the disciples did to be work because they harvested the grain by picking it, threshed it by grinding it between the hands to separate the kernel from the shell, and winnowed it by blowing the chaff away.

These and many, many more border on the ludicrous even insane attempt at restricting activity on the Sabbath, turning God's law into something not intended. And yet today the pendulum has swung the other way and we have become very lax in our treatment of the day of rest.

We have allowed a lot of activity to overshadow the intent of our Sabbath, which for us is Sunday. Too often we fill the day with so much stuff that it has lost its intent of slowing down and giving some undivided attention to God, reflecting on the message or something we read in the week from His Word and using it as a true day of rest. No wonder we hit Monday exhausted because of all the stuff we tried to cram into the weekend. But what the Pharisees claimed was not even supported by

Scripture. They had twisted it into their own definition.

We live in a culture where some occupations require working on Sunday. It's unavoidable, so I encourage you if that is the case, make sure that there is a true day of rest. Take some time on that day of rest to meet with the Lord. If you have a computer, listen to some sermons on line. If you have cable TV, find stations and times where you can watch a service. Spend time resting and renewing your body, mind and spirit by meeting with the Lord.

An innocent activity is questioned, but an intelligent answer is given.

## II. AN INTELLIGENT ANSWER IS GIVEN – v. 3-5

Notice once again that Jesus does not condemn the activity of the disciples. Instead He answers the criticism by taking the Pharisees right to Scripture.

Jesus' response recalls a precedent that says that keeping ceremonial laws is not as important as keeping moral laws. He referred to when David was fleeing from King Saul and he needed food for his men. He stopped to ask a priest for some bread, but the only bread available was the consecrated bread from the holy place. It was the 12 loaves of "shew bread" that was replaced every Sabbath. This was consecrated bread and reserved for the priests alone, but the priest took the bread and gave it with his blessing to David and his men to eat and God did not condemn them. Here a ceremonial law was broken to satisfy a moral need because someone was in need of food.

What Jesus is pointing out is that if God did not have a concern about David breaking a ceremonial law that God made, why would He have a concern about Jesus' disciples breaking a law which was man made.

In Mark's account of this passage (2:27), Jesus makes the statement that **"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."** The Jews had made the observance of the Sabbath so burdensome that no one could enjoy it. Jesus wanted to remind them that the Sabbath was a day to be enjoyed not feared.

Jesus tried to remind the Pharisees why the Sabbath rest was commanded. Let me share three reasons for the Sabbath given by Pastor David Elvery –

1) The Sabbath was meant to be a gift for all people everywhere. Remember the Sabbath was instituted at creation, not when the law was given to Israel. Therefore it was given to all mankind to observe. It was given for humanitarian reasons. In slavery, the people had no let up from work. God gave them the Sabbath so they could rest from work. I don't know about you, but I look forward to weekends. No one should have to work 7 days a week, we are not made for that and it is not healthy. [Years ago I talked with an engineer working for GM and he told me that even machines weren't meant to run 24/7, they need rest as well.](#)

The Sabbath is an opportunity to rest and be refreshed. The command in Exodus 20 was not just for the Israelite, but also for their animals, their servants and their visitors. It was meant to benefit the whole community - a day's rest from their usual work.

2) The Sabbath was a memorial meant to remind people of God's act of creation (Ex 20 & Ex 31) and His gift of redemption from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:12-15).

3) The Sabbath was meant to be a sign of the covenant God established with Israel. (Ex 31) It was to be a sign to all people that the Israelites were holy (set apart). Remember that the Sabbath did not make the people holy, but was a sign that they were already holy. When Israel observed the Sabbath,

they were confirming their commitment to the covenant and acknowledging that they were set apart for God.

Man was not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man as a gift, a memorial and a sign. And in the same way that we are not to be ruled by restrictions and prohibitions regarding what we do and don't do on the Sabbath, Jesus would not be ruled by them either. He said **"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."**

In that one statement Jesus was asserting His deity and that He was the one who after six days of creating the world, created the seventh day as a day of rest. Since He was the creator of the Sabbath He had the right to determine what was and was not appropriate activity on the Sabbath. He is the ruler of the Sabbath.

Jesus gives an intelligent answer. If I were a betting man I would bet that the Pharisees went away fuming and looking for other ways to try and trap Him. We see this occur on another Sabbath where an improper accusation is devised.

### **III. AN IMPROPER ACCUSATION IS DEvised – v. 6-7**

This is only my opinion, but it is my belief that the Pharisees planted this guy in the synagogue knowing that Jesus' compassion would bring Him to do something. We know nothing about the man except that his right hand was shriveled. We don't know if he was born that way or if some accident rendered the hand useless resulting in muscle atrophy.

Our text tells us that the Pharisees were looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus of working on the Sabbath. Another law taught in the Talmud was that you could help a man on the Sabbath only if it was a matter of life or death. Having a shriveled hand did not constitute a life or death situation.

According to their law, healing the man could wait until the Sabbath was over.

I don't know about you, but I would find it irritating and even aggravating that someone would look over everything I said or did in such a critical and condemning way. They were out to get Jesus one way or another. The trap was set, would Jesus take the bait. They couldn't even wait until Jesus was done teaching. It was a deliberate attempt by the Pharisees so they could bring an accusation against Jesus and prove He was nothing more than a charlatan. But here is one point about the Pharisees. Whatever they believed about Jesus, they had come to believe that He had power to heal. They knew He could heal this man, but would He? In that respect they were paying Jesus a compliment even though they were using the situation in a devious manner as a set up. They were watching Him and the word implies watching with evil intent.

They devised an improper accusation. But Jesus made an intentional assertion.

### **IV. AN INTENTIONAL ASSERTION IS MADE – v. 8-10**

Knowing what they were thinking, Jesus asked the man to come forward and stand front and center before everyone. He was about to illustrate His point using the man. We don't know if the man knew the intentions of the Pharisees, but regardless, he did what he was asked and came forward.

Before Jesus did anything He asked a question. It was a simple question, not at all difficult to answer. It was a rhetorical question, so easy even a child could answer correctly.

Let's speculate a moment. We learned that when a teacher began teaching after the reading of Scripture he would sit down and begin to teach. Let's assume that Jesus is seated, He sees the man and invites him to stand in front of the audience. Let's imagine as

well that at this point Jesus rose from where he was seated and stepped over to where the man was now standing and compassionately put His hand on the shoulder of the hand that is disabled or maybe Jesus put His arm around the man to show the tenderness and compassion He felt toward others. Then looking over the crowd He asked His question, a question for all to hear but directed at the Pharisees: **“Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”**

If the Pharisees taught and believed what was right according to the law, let them answer from their expert opinion. The deeper question is this: who will honor God, the one who does good even on the Sabbath when no work was to be done or the one who does evil? The answer of course is the one who does good. How the Pharisees must have been seething at this because not only had Jesus sprung their trap, He used it to His advantage. No one would argue that doing good was the wrong thing to do. He struck a blow at the heart of their religiosity. It was truth vs. tradition. If the law taught that a person could rescue his sheep on the Sabbath, certainly it would be acceptable to rescue a person.

**Matthew 12:11-12 "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."**

In His question, Jesus was also stating that refusing to do good was just as bad as doing evil.

**James 4:17 says “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”**

Then Jesus told the man to stretch out his hand and when he did so, the hand was healed. Stretched out means that it was stretched out to full length, the hand was completely restored to its former state. What Jesus did was not sufficient enough reason to accuse Him or condemn Him because He did

nothing to heal the man except speak. There was no physical labor involved.

## V. AN IRRATIONAL ANGER IS EXPRESSED

### – v. 11

Jesus totally turned the tables on them and they became furious with Him. They began to plot against Him and the intent here is how to kill Him. So enraged were they that according to **Mark 3:6** they conspired with their avowed enemies the Herodians on how they might kill Jesus. The Herodians were Jews who supported Herod. The word furious means filled with madness and is akin to insanity or having a lack of sense. They become consumed and obsessed with how to destroy Jesus.

On one hand, there was the man with the withered hand.

On the other hand, there were the Pharisees with withered hearts.

Jesus loved them all the same. He can heal a withered heart just as easily as a withered hand. The man with the withered hand obeyed Jesus and allowed Him to heal the hand.

The Pharisees with the withered heart rejected the healing Jesus had to offer for them.

Let me see if I can tie this all together as it relates to the Sabbath. Of course you know that we as New Testament believers do not keep the Sabbath in the sense that Old Testament Jews did. We meet on Sunday, they met on Saturday. Old Testament saints met on Saturday to commemorate the finish of creation. New Testament saints meet on Sunday to commemorate the finish of redemption.

**Warren Wiersbe writes: “The Sabbath speaks of rest after work and relates to the law, while the Lord’s Day (Sunday, the first day of the week) speaks of rest before work and relates to grace. The Lord’s Day commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church (Acts 2).”**

While we are now under grace and are not saved by the law, grace does not mean that we no longer have to keep the law. I believe this to mean keeping the intent or spirit of the law and not the letter of the law. It doesn't matter if your Sabbath is Sunday or Wednesday or Friday, the important thing is that you have a Sabbath and keep it for being refreshed and rejuvenated both physically and spiritually. If you must work on Sunday remember that it is not so much keeping the day of the week as it is keeping the principle of the Sabbath.

With that said, do as much work as possible in the six days before your Sabbath, which typically is Sunday for most of us, and don't leave all your house work or errands for Sunday. Keep it as a true day of rest.

**Billy Graham once said, "Jesus tells us it is OK to help our ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath. But, if your ox gets in the ditch every Sabbath, you need to either get rid of the ox or fill up the ditch." Some of you may need to fill up the ditch.**

I will tell you that during the summer there are Sundays where I take some time to mow. There isn't much physical to it because it's a riding mower. But it is also a time I think about the sermon, what I could or should have said; what I forgot to say or what I should have said differently. I'll pray some or just enjoy the beauty of creation, even the weeds.

With that said, we should limit some activities that we do on Sunday, especially if they take us away from church where there is a choice. It pains me to see the parking lots down the road filled Sunday mornings with parents taking their families to watch and play Little League instead of to church. So what if that's the only time it's offered. Find or start a league on another day. Paul told the Romans not to let the world squeeze you into its mold.

If something keeps you from coming to church

regularly you may need to get rid of it.

Don't turn Sunday morning into a mental debate about whether or not you should attend if there are no extenuating circumstances. We need to remember that this is a day to commemorate what Jesus did for us. It's a memorial for God's blessings and time to celebrate with others what He has done for us. Someone said if your excuse would not be good enough to keep you from work on Monday it should not keep you from church on Sunday. When one person is sick in the family no one ever thinks that the whole family has to stay home with them if it is on Monday, why does that work if it is Sunday. Make church a priority.

If doing good is lawful on the Sabbath, then consider opportunities to serve others rather than just making it about ourselves. Visit someone or go out to lunch with someone.

We were not made for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was made for us. It was made to enjoy, to celebrate, to worship, and to rest. It is not a day to be bound by rules and regulations. It is a gift from a loving God who wants us to spend some time in communion with Him, to rest and be refreshed physically and spiritually. Before we judge others for what they do on the Sabbath, let's make sure we are keeping it in the spirit of the law and not just the letter. With that said, make your Sabbath a priority to honor God.

Blue laws aren't the answer for keeping the Sabbath, having a heart for God is. Then you will want to honor Him with what you do on the Sabbath.