**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST**

**Luke 5:33-6:11**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we continue our series called “The Gospel of Luke: Finding Certainty in a World of Doubt.” Last Sunday, we saw Jesus do some remarkable things. He miraculously healed two men – one of leprosy, and the other of paralysis – but as we saw, the miracles were not the point. The purpose of Jesus showing that he had authority over physical illness was to show that he had authority over spiritual illness. The one who cleansed the leper could also cleanse the soul, freeing us from sin and enabling us to walk towards God in faith.

Up to this point in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has made some astounding claims about himself. When he was a 12 year old boy, he called the Temple of God his “Father’s house”, thus identifying himself as God’s son. In his first sermon in Nazareth, he claimed to be the promised Messiah of Isaiah 61 who had come to bring liberty and healing in the power of the Spirit. At the Sea of Galilee, he calls a group of fishermen to leave everything to follow him after he convicted them of their sin through his display of divine knowledge. And when he healed the paralyzed man, he claimed to have the very authority of God to forgive people’s sin.

What Luke is doing is he is slowly building his case to prove to his readers that Jesus was in fact the Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. In order to do that, he must first show us that Jesus believed those things about himself. What we have seen in the first five chapters of Luke’s gospel is that there was no question in Jesus’ mind that he was indeed the Son of God.

In his classic book *Mere Christianity¸* C.S. Lewis sets out the implications of Jesus’ claims about himself. Lewis is responding to those who say that Jesus wasn’t the Son of God, though he is respected as a great moral teacher. Lewis argues that this option just isn’t open to us. If we look at what Jesus said about himself, he could have been one of three things. One, he could have been a lunatic, meaning that he really believed his claims about himself, but those claims were not true. Two, he could have been a liar, meaning that all his claims about himself were meant to deceive people into following him, thus making him a master manipulator. Or three, he could have been who he claimed to be – that is, he could have been Lord. This is how Lewis put it:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

In our text today, Jesus is going to make further claims about himself that spark three controversies with the Pharisees, the religious leaders who saw it as their responsibility to guard and propagate Jewish orthodoxy. Their answer to Jesus’ claims is that he was not Lord. In their view, he was a liar who needed to be silenced. The question our text raises for us is whether we will respond like the Pharisees. Will we reject Jesus’ claims about himself, or will we believe?

The title of this sermon is **The Lordship of Christ**. My aim today is to show you that **Jesus Radically Changes Religious Practices by Radically Changing Religion Itself.**

(1) **NEW FASTING**

Our text today begins in verse 33: “And they said to him, ‘The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.” As people observed three of the major religious groups of the time – the disciples of John the Baptist, the disciples of the Pharisees, and the disciples of Jesus – they began to notice that one of these groups is not like the others. The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were old school. They did what they were expected to do. They fasted and prayed, and everyone knew it. The disciples of Jesus, on the other hand, were different. They didn’t do what religious people were expected to do. Instead of fasting and praying, they always seemed to be eating and drinking. In other words, they appeared to be having way more fun than they were supposed to.

Fasting was a central part of Jewish religious life. It was practiced during religious festivals and during special times of intercessory prayer. It was an expression of mourning, a way for the people of Israel to express their grief to God during a particularly harsh time of suffering or trial. The hope was that, when God saw their grieving and mourning, he would be more likely to answer their prayers.

For example, when Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down, and its gates destroyed by fire, this is what he did:

“As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” (Neh. 1:4)

Similarly, when God revealed to Daniel that Jerusalem would suffer for seventy years, he fasted and put on sackcloth and ashes, which served as visible signs of his mourning before God:

“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” (Dan. 9:3)

The Pharisees looked at these instances of fasting in the Scriptures and turned them into rules. They required their disciples to fast every Monday and Thursday, not because they were actually grieving about anything, but because they had to follow the rules. Their fasting actually became quite a show, as they would cover themselves with ash and holler with fake grief in the streets, so that everyone would know that they were fasting. As a result, everyone thought that this is what the truly religious people did.

But when they looked at Jesus’ disciples, they saw something different. They weren’t fasting. Instead, they were eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors. As this continued, questions were beginning to brew about whether Jesus could really be sent by God, because he didn’t seem to be very godly.

Jesus responds to these questions in verse 34: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.’” Jesus compares his current situation with that of a wedding. He is the bridegroom, and his disciples are his wedding guests. Do wedding guests mourn at their friend’s wedding? Of course not! They rejoice! They celebrate! They have a big party! A wedding is not the right time to fast. A wedding is the right time to eat and drink. That’s why his disciples do not fast.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He’s saying that fasting is all about *him*. When he is present, there’s no need to fast. When he is not present, then fasting should begin again. Fasting revolves around Jesus, for he is the Lord of the fast.

This has extraordinary implications. If fasting expresses sorrow, and fasting ceases when Jesus is present, then it follows that sorrow ceases when Jesus is present. Jesus is saying that, so long as he is here, there is absolutely nothing for those who trust in him and follow him to grieve about. Yes, people will still suffer. There was no shortage of people to heal and demons to cast out even while Jesus was on earth. But the point is that Jesus came to bring a joy so great that all the pain in the world could not compare. Jesus had come to usher in a new era, an era of joy, which would replace the former age of darkness and despair.

This is what the angel prophesied when he appeared to the shepherds after Jesus was born, announcing, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of *great joy* that will be for all the people.” Jesus himself, in announcing the beginning of his own ministry, declared that “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me…to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”, the year of Jubilee – the year of *joy*. This is the difference that Jesus makes in the world. His presence is so potent, so transformative, that all grief must bow to the reign of joy.

As great as this new era of joy is, there’s a shadow cast over it by what Jesus says in verse 35: “The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” The picture Jesus paints here is dark and troubling. It’s hard to imagine a scenario more tragic than a bridegroom being forcibly “taken away” on his wedding day. That’s what happened to Jesus. In the middle of his reign of joy, Jesus would be taken away to be crucified. He would be ripped away from his beloved disciples; He would be beaten, mocked, and scourged; He would be nailed to a wooden cross; and He would die an excruciating death.

The disciples would be tempted to believe that this was the end of Jesus’ reign of joy, but it wasn’t. In fact, it was the very means by which Jesus would fully usher in his new, joy-filled kingdom! The good news of great joy that Jesus came to bring was not just his presence on earth. The good news of great joy was that Jesus has made a way for us to be with him forever, and it was through the cross that this way would be made.

Jesus didn’t suffer and die on the cross for his own sins. He suffered and died on the cross for ours. On the cross, he took the penalty that our sins deserved upon himself, so that our sins could be forgiven. And now, all those who trust in Christ are reconciled to God in joy-filled relationship forever.

This is the gospel message, that God gives us his Son in order that he might give us himself forever. The gospel alone has the power to free you from the overwhelming grief and despair of this world’s troubles, so that you may enjoy God forever. All you have to do is turn to him in repentance and faith. Repent by acknowledging your sin and seeking to leave it behind. Put your faith in God by trusting him not only to forgive you of your sin through Christ, but to free you from it. When you do, you will finally have the joy that no grief can overcome.

But as great as this joy is for all who have turned to Christ in repentance and faith, it is only a taste of the fullness of joy that awaits us. Jesus is with us, but we are not yet fully with him. He is with us through the presence of his Spirit who abides in us, but we won’t see him face to face until we join him in heaven. In this life, we only taste the joy of fellowship with him. There is coming a day when we will enter into the feast of joy that will satisfy us forever.

This is why Christians fast. We do not fast out of grief like Israel did. We fast out of longing for Jesus. When we fast, the pangs of our physical hunger for food mirror our pangs of spiritual hunger for Jesus. We don’t need to fast out of sorrow any longer, for we know that Jesus has come, and that he will come again. The dawn of the era of joy is already here. We simply await its fulfillment. And as we wait for its fulfillment, one of the ways we express our longing for Jesus is by fasting. Jesus has brought us a new way of fasting, because he has brought us a new way of coming to God through the cross.

(2) **NEW RESTING**

Jesus goes on to give us two parables that capture the scope of what he has come to do, but we’re going to save that for our third point. First, I want us to see how Jesus changes another fundamental institution in Jewish religious life – the Sabbath – which leads to our second point: new resting.

I must say at the outset that, as much as I would love to teach you about how the Sabbath is meant to function in a Christian’s life, that’s not the point of our text. Luke’s point is ultimately Christological – that is, he primarily wants to say something about Jesus, not the Sabbath. So please don’t misunderstand this text as teaching us all that the New Testament says about the Sabbath. If you want to learn about the Christian’s relationship to the Sabbath, you need to read Hebrews 3-4.

In Chapter 6, Luke gives us two stories that both take place on a Sabbath. Verse 1 says that Jesus and his disciples were going through the grain fields on a Sabbath. The disciples were plucking up heads of grain, rubbing them between their hands, and eating them. Verse 6 says that, on another Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue when he encounters a man whose right hand was withered. The two stories are related. In the first story, Jesus is going to reveal that he is the Lord of the Sabbath, and therefore able to provide authoritative teaching about the nature of the Sabbath. In the second story, Jesus will confirm his authority as Lord of the Sabbath by miraculously healing the man’s withered hand on the Sabbath.

Like fasting, the Sabbath was a fundamental part of Jewish religious life. It was one of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20, which said this:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, 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…” (Exodus 20:8-10a)

There was no question that the Sabbath was extremely important to God, and therefore to God’s people. It was the sign that confirmed God’s covenant with Israel that he would be their God, and they would be his people. It was so important that if anyone violated the Sabbath, they were to be put to death.

But what did it mean to “not do any work”? You may think that it’s a black and white issue, but it’s not. On the one hand, in Numbers 15, a man who was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath was put to death. On the other hand, in 2 Kings 11, the priest Jehoiada ordered soldiers to guard King Joash on a Sabbath as Jehoiada helped him reclaim the throne of David from his evil grandmother. The guards were clearly doing work on a Sabbath, but they weren’t condemned for it.

Since the Bible doesn’t go into lists of do’s and do not’s, how would anyone determine whether Jesus’ disciples were breaking the Sabbath? Jesus’ reply is just as stunning as his teaching about fasting. He says in verse 5, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”! Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and as the Lord of the Sabbath, he has the authority to set and administrate the rules of the Sabbath. Jesus had said that fasting was all about him, and now he makes the further claim that the Sabbath was all about him as well. He had the authority to determine to what extent his disciples could do work on the Sabbath, because he was the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus shows the Pharisees that this wasn’t without precedent. There was a time when God allowed David to break the black and white letter of the law as well. In verses 3-4, Jesus recounts this story about David from 1 Samuel 21: “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?”

What’s Jesus’ point? He’s saying that, though it was unlawful for David to eat the bread of the Presence and to give some to his friends as well, neither David nor his friends were condemned for it. David committed many sins in his life, but this wasn’t one of them. In God’s eyes, it was more important for David to take care of himself and his friends than to follow the black and white rules of the law in that situation.

This doesn’t mean that God gives everyone the authority to determine when the black and white letter of the law must give way to greater priorities. David was a prophet, and God’s Anointed King, and as such, he had the authority to determine that feeding himself and his friends while they were fleeing from Saul was more important than not eating the holy bread. The same is true for Jesus. Jesus is more than God’s Anointed King. He is God’s Anointed *One*, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and the Lord of the Sabbath. If David could feed his friends in violation of the letter of the law, then Jesus could as well.

Jesus confirms his Lordship over the Sabbath in the next story about the Sabbath. Verse 6 tells us that, while teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath, Jesus sees a man whose right hand was withered. While many were there to hear Jesus teach, that wasn’t true for everyone. Verse 7 says that the scribes and Pharisees were watching him, “to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him.” The Pharisees and scribes were looking for trouble. They were looking to dig up dirt on Jesus, so that they could bury him under it.

Now if Jesus wanted to heal the man, he could do one of two things: he could wait for the Sabbath to be over, or he could heal him immediately. Waiting would avoid controversy. Not waiting would be dangerous. Jesus chose not to wait, for in his eyes, the man had suffered long enough. The fact that healing on the Sabbath would bring danger to himself was not reason enough to keep him from doing what was in his power to help this man.

Jesus reveals his thought process in verse 9, “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” What Jesus is saying is that there is never an excuse to not do good to others when it is in your power to do it. The fact that it was a Sabbath wasn’t relevant. The laws of God pertaining to the Sabbath were never meant to be followed so rigidly that God’s people would sit idly by while their neighbours suffered.

No one offers a response to Jesus’ question, so Jesus answers it for them by what he does next in verse 10: “And after looking around at them all he said to him, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he did so, and his hand was restored.’” This was God’s stamp of approval on Jesus. God confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Lord of the Sabbath by granting him the power to heal on the Sabbath. And if Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, then what he teaches about the Sabbath must be true.

In this way, Jesus gives the Pharisees a new way of understanding Sabbath rest. The Sabbath isn’t ultimately about rules, about what can and cannot be done. The Sabbath is about honouring God, and honouring God may require us to do some work as we obey his command to love our neighbours as ourselves.

(3) **NEW RELIGION**

Jesus has brought a new way to fast and a new way to rest, but ultimately, Jesus hasn’t just come to renew the ways that the Jewish people thought about these two religious practices. He has come to bring an entirely new way of relating to God. New fasting and new resting are part of a new religious order. This leads us to our third point, and the central point of our text today: new religion.

Jesus explains this in two parables at the end of Chapter 5. In the first parable, he says in verse 36, “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.” When I was about 13 years old, I had a favourite shirt I always wore when I wanted to feel cool. It was a white, Nike polo shirt that hung down to my mid thighs, and I always wore it untucked. One day, when I was feeling particularly cool, I decided to wear that shirt and go out to my backyard to shoot a basketball around. I was a terrible shot, and it was only a matter of time before the ball somehow ended up in my neighbour’s backyard. Rather than do the responsible thing and ask my neighbour if I could fetch the ball, I decided to climb the fence and retrieve it myself. Everything was going well, until my white, Nike polo shirt caught on the fence and ripped as I climbed down.

Several thoughts crossed my mind. I felt angry at the fence. I felt regret that I had tried something so foolish. I felt depressed, because without my cool shirt, there was no way I could ever be cool again. But do you know what thought never crossed my mind? I never thought it would be a good idea to buy a brand new Nike polo shirt just so that I could cut it up and patch up the rip in my old one.

That’s what Jesus is saying here. “*No one* tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment.” People don’t do that. If the old garment tears and you have a new garment, you don’t ruin the new one to patch up the old. You ditch the old one and keep the new! It’s common sense.

Jesus uses this simple parable about clothes to make a more important point, not about clothes, but about religion. Jesus is saying that he has come to bring about a completely new way of relating to God. The way that we come to God, the way that we know God, and the way that we obey God is about to be radically changed by Jesus. And if we try to add this new way of relating to God to the old way, then the new way will be completely ruined.

Jesus makes a similar point in the second parable in verses 37-38, “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.” In those days, people used to drink wine out of an animal skin that would be sewn together to make a drinking pouch. A fresh wineskin would be soft and flexible, but as it got older, it would harden and become brittle. If you know anything about wine, you’ll know that as new wine ferments, it expands. If new wine were to be placed in an old wineskin, the brittle skin would burst as the wine fermented, ruining both the skin and the wine. New wine had to be placed in a new wineskin, so that the skin could expand as the wine expanded.

What’s Jesus saying? He’s saying that the new religion that he has come to bring into the world cannot fit within the religion of the Jewish people. The Jews obeyed God’s commands in order to earn his favour and avoid his anger. They fasted and rested out of obligation, believing that they needed to do those things to become right with God. That was the old wine.

Jesus has come to change this. For Jesus, fasting wasn’t about keeping rules. Fasting was about longing for him, the one who had brought indestructible joy into the world. The Sabbath wasn’t about long lists of “do not’s”. It was about using the day to honour the Lord through worship and serving others.

Jesus was radically changing these religious practices, because he was about to radically change the way we relate to God through his death and resurrection. Jesus would die for our sins, so that we wouldn’t have to fear God’s anger. He would live a perfect life on our behalf, so that we wouldn’t have to be perfect to earn God’s favour. Jesus frees us from the old wine of coming to God through our good works, and he gives us the new wine of God coming to us through the works of Christ.

Jesus ends these parables on a somber note, saying that as good as this new wine is, many will refuse to give up the old. Jesus says in verse 39, “And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’” This is exactly how the Pharisees responded to Jesus in 6:11: “But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.”

**CONCLUSION**

The question for all of us today is how will *we* respond to Jesus? Jesus has made some extraordinary claims about himself. He has said that fasting is all about him; He has called himself the Lord of the Sabbath; and he has declared that he has come to bring about a new religious era, when people no longer need to relate to God on the basis of their good works, but on the basis of Christ’s work on their behalf.

Is Jesus a liar, lunatic, or Lord? Was he a deceiver, was he crazy, or was he who he claimed to be? Like the Pharisees, there are many in our day who would call Jesus a liar or a lunatic. They are in love with the old wine, believing that they can earn their way into God’s favour by their good works. Some may like some of the things Jesus says and try to mix them with their theology of works, but it won’t work. The new wine of Christ will be ruined in the old wineskins of works. It needs the completely new wineskin of grace to be of any benefit to us.

Jesus wasn’t a liar. He was the most righteous person who ever lived. He was often the only one willing to do good when everyone else had refused. Jesus also wasn’t a lunatic. He was sound in mind, penetrating in his insight, and able to reason with the unreasonable. That leaves one option: Jesus was and is who he claimed to be. He is the Lord of the Sabbath; He is the bridegroom in God’s heavenly feast; and He has come to bring true joy and true rest to the world.

May the Lord help each of us to respond to Jesus as Lord, that all of us may enter into the everlasting joy of his presence.