

Luke 14:1 - 6 Arguing About the Sabbath with the one who Owns the Sabbath

1 And it came about when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching Him closely. 2 And there, in front of Him was a certain man suffering from dropsy. 3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But they kept silent. And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away. 5 And He said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" 6 And they could make no reply to this.

Beginning in chapter 14 this morning, we've entered a long and rich section in Luke's gospel that is a paranthesis in a way. Luke has been generally chronological in his story of Jesus. But he has taken us almost to the final week, teaching in the temple, passion week if he were to be slavish to chronology.

What Luke does here is take some time to cover a lot of incidences that comprise the full teaching of Jesus. These are windows that open up for us the message, the teaching of Jesus.

And Luke is going to employ this method for many chapters. Chronologically we will get to Jericho as He approaches Jerusalem for the final time, in chapter 19. And it won't be until chapter 22 that the story of the betrayal and false trial and death will unfold.

So then, we have months if not years to just immerse ourselves in the rich rich teaching of Jesus in Luke's gospel. And we begin this section this morning with a story of conflict with religious people. The uber religious, zealously religious rulers of Israel. False religion that is in a direct conflict with Jesus and ultimately threatens and takes the life of Jesus.

But as we've often said, the conflict is much deeper than the actors on the stage acting it out. This is a conflict between those who belong to God, and

those who belong to Satan. This little scenario is an act in the ultimate war of Satan with God.

Satan owns the ones who have been duped into bringing conflict and death to Jesus and those who are following Jesus who belong to God.

Pam and I have been watching *The West Wing* on Netflix. We both enjoy the brilliant writing and acting in that series. Alan Alda plays Arnold Vinick, who is running for president on the republican ticket. Martin Sheen plays president Bartlett who is ending his 2nd term. Relax, I'm not going to say anything political.

Arnold Vinick and President Bartlett have a conversation about the bible in one of the episodes. President Bartlett is a somewhat religious Catholic, and Arnold Vinick, also a catholic but a non practicing unbeliever is taking some heat for not being very religious at all, which doesn't bode well with the republican base.

Here's a little snippet from the dialogue;

Jed Bartlet : I went to mass every Sunday long before I went into politics.

Sen. Arnold Vinick : I did, too.

Jed Bartlet : Why'd you stop?

Sen. Arnold Vinick : One Christmas, my wife gave me a very old edition of the King James Bible - 17th century. It was a real find for a book collector. It was a thrill just to hold it - then I read it.

Jed Bartlet : You can't take it literally.

Sen. Arnold Vinick : Yeah, that's what my priest friends kept telling me, but the more I read it, the less I could believe. I could not believe that there was a God who said that the penalty for working on the sabbath was death. I

couldn't believe there was a God who said the penalty for adultery was death.

Jed Bartlet : I'm more of a New Testament man myself.

Sen. Arnold Vinick : I couldn't believe there was a God who had no penalty for slavery. The Bible has no problem with slavery at all. Lincoln could've used a little help from the Bible.

Theology 101 from the TV set;

- The Bible is esteemed and considered valuable as long as you don't read it.
- If you do read it, don't take it literally.
- God wants to kill people who work on the sabbath.
- God wants to kill people who fool around.
- The New Testament God isn't quite as mean as the old Testament God.
- And God has no problem with slavery.
- Men can stand in judgement on God being of higher moral category than a hateful murderous God who is OK with slavery

That's the general consensus of the world around us. But as I thought about that, and I did, I thought what the world doesn't understand is the deeper underlying story.

In Genesis chapter 3, the pinnacle of God's creation, humankind, fall into a vicious slavery. They exchange the glorious friendship with the creator for a doomed slavery to an evil master when Eve and Adam rebelled against God and sinned..

What the fools on TV don't understand is that we are all born into a slavery to sin that is doomed to ultimate destruction. Slaves who are condemned. The slavery now is actually the better part. The destruction later for our rebellion is eternal hell.

This entire book from chapter 3 of Genesis forward is the story of God redeeming His chosen elect out of slavery. God has opened a door of possibility for all men to repent and freely leave the old slavemasters, Sin, and Satan, behind and come into a new Kingdom where God is our loving and benevolent Master.

We're slaves either way folks. But if we repent of this world and join God in His, our sins are forgiven, and we have clean clothes given to us, the righteousness of Christ Himself, blameless, becomes ours. And ultimately, our new Master and Father adopts us and makes us sons and heirs with His own Son, the Lord, Jesus Christ.

This book is concerned with eternity. Slavery in this world is a 5 minute predicament in the grand reality of eternity. The fools errand of this world's wise is freedom from everything, free, free, free to do whatever you want however you want whenever you want. Great. After 5 minutes of that, hell forever?

The Bible is somewhat unconcerned with slavery in this world, because in this 5 minute long life, you've got one job. Repent and accept God's free gift. Your status beyond that one eternal thing, is not important. That's why Paul speaks of slavery in eternal terms when he says;

21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. 22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

This life is temporal. If you're a slave, and when Christ called you, it's necessary to remain a slave. You may be a slave in status to this world but you're a freedman in Christ. Likewise if you're a free person when Christ called you, guess what, you just became Christ's slave. Glorious slavery!

Christ purchases us out of the slavery of sin and the condemnation of this

world to belong to Him.

All of that to say; There is a deeper sense of reality beyond what our eyes see going on in this world. Much deeper. Eternity is beyond the skies and stars and universes that God will roll up like a worn out scroll some day. I want us to think on that deeper level as we unfold and unpack what Jesus does and says in these next weeks and months.

The reality of conflict between Jesus and the Jewish false religion is a much deeper reality than the surface players. Satan wants to destroy Jesus. God sovereignly allows Satan to accomplish that end. But then God raises His Son from the dead and opens the way for many captives to come to freedom. That's the bigger picture behind the local play and actors we'll look at this morning.

1 And it came about when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching Him closely.

We've talked about the false religion of the party of the pharisee's. They were legalists on steroids. If God likes people who follow rules, these duped pharisees thought, we can actually do a lot better job of making rules than God ever did.

We can compound the rules and add to them until it gets completely ridiculous. So by that platform and standard, if God is pleased by rules keepers, just think how ecstatic He must be about us, because we have multiplied His original rules by a thousand times.

Layers upon layers of man made traditions added to the revealed word of God. And since the Sabbath is His special day, we're going to double down on rules pertaining to the Sabbath day. Excruciating rules. The day God designed as rest became a day of excruciating stress. No one could keep all of their invented rules.

It's rather like a lawyer asking you the same question 50 different ways until

you finally answer it slightly, ever so slightly different from one of the other times and the trap slams shut. You have conflicting testimony. You are caught in a lie. Sort of like that.

Their rules were a physical impossibility and a mental exhaustion. One way or another they can close the trap on you. So it's no accident that our story takes place on a Sabbath.

This group has it in for Jesus. Their verdict is already in. Jesus must die. That is already the foregone conclusion and they are in complete agreement. The problem they face is the charges. They need a case against Jesus. That's what this little lunch on the Sabbath is about.

Get Jesus to come to your house for bread on the Sabbath. We'll get Him on something, somehow. Improper ceremonial washings maybe. He's already told us that He is Lord of the Sabbath. He thinks He owns the sabbath. This'll be easy. He has contempt for "our" sabbath.

But then they stack the deck. In their favor. Remember now, these folks are pawns. Dupes of Satan, doing his bidding. Slaves of Satan and slaves to their own sinful self righteous pride.

2 And there, in front of Him was a certain man suffering from dropsy.

This is a plant. Painfully obvious to anyone who understands that culture. These self righteous pharisees have nothing but contempt and hatred for this poor ailing man with the dropsy. That's because in their theology, God has smitten him with his illness because he's wicked.

Dropsy is the old name for a condition we now call edema. Edema is swelling caused by excess fluid trapped in your body's tissues. Usually it's caused by other deeper problems like heart disease.

To the pharisees of Jesus day, this illness, this condition, dropsy proves this man is evil. He is unclean. He is an outcast, and particularly so to them.

Phariseeism is a tight club. Almost no one gets into that club. If you're rich and righteous, we'll think about it. All else, do not apply.

Particularly if you're sick. That's just an outward sign of your inward evil. God has visited that illness on you because of your sin. Or maybe even your parents sin. God is cranky that way. Some are sick because of someone else's previous sin. Doesn't matter. You're not welcome in this club.

So the sick guy is an obvious plant because, we know Jesus can't resist healing him, and it's the Sabbath, and healing someone on the Sabbath is work, and that proves Jesus is NOT from God and He's just as evil as the guy He heals.

There is an irony here for us to explore. These men who are crazed to find some reason to murder Jesus are suffering from spiritual dropsy. They have spiritual edema. Pride. They are the spiritual equivalent of this poor sick man. They are puffed up and bloated over their own self invented self righteousness. Their puffed up pride is just the outward sign of a far deeper inward problem. They have spiritual heart disease. Sin.

The bloated man they have forced into their midst is a physical picture of their spiritual condition. Puffed up spiritually. Bloated spiritually. They are far sicker with a much more serious disease than the poor sick man they have employed to trap Jesus. How sad that the man in the room who can cure the physical disease can also cure the spiritual disease as well, and they won't have Him. They love their sin.

So that's the set-up, and verse one says; *they were watching Him closely* Of course they are. The verdict is in. All we need are the charges. This Jesus needs to die. Work on the Sabbath; Death by stoning.

Numbers 15:32-36 The very verses Arnold Vinick is upset over are the ones these pharisees hope to use to employ their verdict of death.

32 Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. 33 And those who found him gathering

sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. 34 They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him.

35 Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." 36 So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

That's where these Pharisee's are going. And they would have accomplished their task that day except that Rome didn't allow them to do capitol punishment. Rome had to make that call. Rome has occupied Israel at this time and has banned Israel from carrying out their own capitol punishment. But that's where their heads are at.

We're going to trap Jesus in a capitol crime and then we're going to annoy Rome until they give the green light to kill this guy. The verdict is in, we just need to make it happen. We're in the evidence stage, gathering perceived crimes. When we've got what we need, then we'll get Rome involved. This is vicious hatred.

Now then, first a little side bar. If I've caused you to stumble in the same sense that Arnold Vinick was stumbling, over a God who kills people for gathering sticks on the Sabbath; Ask yourself this question. The problem isn't that God followed through with death for that one guy, the problem is that He let's any of us live. Why hasn't He struck all of us dead?

All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. The penalty of rebellion against God is death. Don't be upset about the guy gathering sticks. Beg for mercy for yourself while there is still some borrowed time.

OK, back to the situation at hand. This is the perfect set-up. A bunch of self righteous ceremonial clean guys, a sick guy, obviously unclean, and Jesus who can't help Himself from healing sick folk. Even on the Sabbath.

Let's talk just for a moment about the elephant in the room. One of their own states it best. *1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."* Jn. 3:1,2

Like the baby in the commercial that points out the obvious, and says am I the only one that thinks this is weird; These pharisee's are plotting the murder of the person who does miracles of such a nature that only the God of creation could ever do.

When Jesus grabs this guy and heals him, it's almost a non-essential part of the story. He heals him and dismisses him, but that healing involved the transformation and creation of millions of cells that retain the same DNA that made this human the unique creation in God's image that he was born as.

Jesus just creates new cells with perfect dna that solves the illness. Perfect health with perfect cells, made from nothing. Hello?? Only God can do that! And you guys are so blinded with hatred you look right past the miracle, to the murder. Astonishing. To them, the miracles are just an inconvenience to get beyond. Nothing more. They say He does the miracles using satanic powers.

3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"

It's a good question. What does the old testament say about this? In Matthew 12, the pharisee's ask Jesus this same question in a very similar situation. What is the law.

God instituted the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. It's a day off from your normal labors. Common sense is required.

If you're a doctor and your daily work is healing people, you would rest on the Sabbath day. But if it's a life and death thing, you preserve life. That's about it. Someone has a gash and the blood is draining out of them, you don't say,

sorry, it's the Sabbath. Come see me tomorrow . . . if you live.

Even Jesus said that. In Luke 6; The man with the withered hand, Jesus says to His onlookers in a similar situation; *9 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?"*

But in Jesus case, there is a further consideration. He has already informed them that He is the Lord **OF** the Sabbath. Jesus trumps the sabbath rules. He owns the Sabbath day. Same as all the others. But particularly the sabbath day. It's His. He decides what He will or will not do on this day that He is Lord over.

From the perspective of the false religion of the pharisee's, you may not heal on the sabbath. They had books and books of how this would work. If there's an accident and someone is bleeding to death, you can apply a tourniquet to stop the bleeding and go no further.

If someone is choking, go ahead and do the heimlich maneuver. If the baby poops, I guess you can change the diaper. And on and on ad infinitum. Rule after rule, never prescribed by God in His book.

In their minds, this is definitely not a life or death situation. Jesus is a physician. A really good one apparently. He speaks and the condition disappears. He needs to wait until tomorrow, or even better, just skip it.

They don't care a whit about the poor guy with the edema. Their conflict is with Jesus. And His claim that He owns the sabbath. Only God owns the sabbath. Of course, only God can heal the guy, but never mind *that*. Intense moment.

3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But they kept silent.

This is the silence of hatred. No one speaks. Jesus can read every heart

present. We hate you and if you do this, if you heal this guy, we will prosecute to the death. *And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away.*

Those words, *He took hold of him*, are special. This was a forceful touch. Jesus grabbed this fellow. Why? Jesus has style, that's why. This particular illness is just the trapping of fluid in ankles, legs, arms, feet, etc. This would not be as spectacular of a healing as the paralytic or the withered hand or the man born blind.

They went in to eat bread. If Jesus touches this guy who is presumed "unclean" simply because of his condition, then Jesus breaks more rules if He goes ahead and has some bread. Double indemnity, at least from the pharisees perspective. If you touch what is unclean, then you become unclean by association.

What they fail to understand is when Jesus gets ahold of you, it doesn't make Him dirty, it makes you clean. Jesus could have healed him without the touch, but the touch just adds layers to the story.

For the pharisees, now He's not only guilty of working on the sabbath, He's also unclean. For the poor sick guy, he's not only made well, he's accepted by the touch of a loving saviour.

These days more than ever, we're painfully aware of the importance of touch. Keep that mask on and if you touch anything, or anyone, you're unclean and you need to go home and wash wash wash. Not so different from the pharisees, really. Even a guy like me that is rough and tough and doesn't need to be hugged, feels a bit of the need for touch.

I like to dis-arm people with a smile. Little children especially are put to ease by a smile. The shy ones will look away, but they can't help looking back again at a smile. The checker in the grocery store's job is a little easier if there's a friendly smile. These ubiquitous masks have eliminated my smile. We need the touches of friendship. It was important that Jesus didn't just

speak this man well, He touched him and he became well.

It's lovely that Jesus didn't just heal this guy and send him on his way, He did it with contact. Sort of like the leper who said, If you are willing, you can make me clean, and Jesus said, I am willing, and touched the leper. Jesus didn't get the illness, the ill got the cleanness. That's what happens when Jesus touches lives.

Then He dismisses the guy. Trust me when I say, that guy did NOT want to be in that room. Except on the outside chance that he will get to be well instead of sick, being the unclean guy in the clean room with all the self righteous hypocrites is not high on anybody's list.

Jesus heals him, and dismisses him. At ease. Dismissed. This isn't about you. You're healed and you don't need to stay in the middle of this conflict. I don't know about you, but that's what I would want. Nobody'd have to tell me twice, it's OK to leave. You don't need to stay here with the bullies and haters. I'm going to deal with them. And He does.

5 And He said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"

Did somebody say; Double Standard? It's OK for you to pull an ox out of the quicksand on the Sabbath day. You're not about to lose an ox over what day it is. In fact you're probably going to go get your team of other oxen and hitch the stuck one up for the pull. All on the sabbath. Ox's are expensive. And son's are a magnitude more value than an ox.

What's the difference? The things in Jesus example have value. Value to their greedy owners that trumps whatever the sabbath rules might be. But this sick guy has no value to them. He can stay sick. In fact it was God who made him sick in the first place because he was obviously some kind of a sinner that caused that punishment.

Jesus says; You've got a double standard. Things of value to you can trump

the phony sabbath rules you've created, but things of no value to you cannot. Now guess who's lord of the sabbath. These men with their double standards have made themselves lord of the sabbath.

Double standard. They are lords of the sabbath deciding in favor of their own greed and wealth what they can break their own rules to accomplish on the sabbath. But the real Lord of the sabbath, the God of creation who is in their midst, cannot?? Whoa!

Now think back to our opening monologue. We are born into a doomed world, born to be slaves of an evil taskmaster. Who owns us? Ultimately? The Creator. Can He pull His sons and daughters out of a ditch on the sabbath day? Of course He can. *Vs. 6 And they could make no reply to this.*

Jesus continually has this effect on His enemies. He speaks with an economy of wisdom and logic in so few words that we stand amazed in His presence. Only God can say so much, with such finality of logic and perfect wisdom with so few words.

And from our perspective as believers we stand in wonder at these men, that they can stand in the presence of God in human flesh, hear His words in His wisdom, given with His power and the effect is that you double down in your loathing and hatred and murder.

Something beyond normal reason is happening here. God speaks as only God can speak, in your presence. God does what only God can do in front of your very eyes. And the result is that you double down in your hatred and murder.

This is completely irrational behaviour. Rational thought and judgement takes leave of people as they spiral further and further away from God. We've all seen it. Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up to hate.

But in the case of these men, it's an entirely new level of that phenomenon. The God of creation does a creative miracle in front of your eyes and the result is a seething hatred beyond any possible rationality.

God responds to the feeblest faith, the weakest belief by adding to it. God will meet your weak faith way more than half way and bless it with increased faith.

But God responds in like manner to dis-belief. He hardens simple dis-belief into compounded irrational hatred. That's where these pharisees have landed. The tiniest faith can spiral upward. But disbelief because you love your sin can spiral downward into an irrational hardness of heart.

I urge you this morning to open your hearts in belief. Give what little tiny weak faith you may have to God and He will increase it. No one else ever did the things that Jesus did. No one else ever spoke like Jesus spoke. Hang your faith, small, weak, whatever it is, on those irrefutable facts, and believe. Eternity hangs in the balance.