



-- Read Luke 6:1-11

-- Pray

-- **Review**

1.) We miss the point whenever we give primary importance to secondary things.

The point of part one of this message was this: Our Lord is calling us to stop majoring on the minors. As you will recall, the Pharisees had horribly missed the point of true life because they continually gave primary importance to secondary things. They came to believe that attaining God's favor was chiefly about perfectly performing an outrageously strict and utterly unbiblical assortment of Sabbath rules and rituals. Thus, as we discussed, not only had they horribly missed the point of the Sabbath; worse yet, they missed the very essence of true life. So that we do not make the same mistake, we must always remember that in any and every situation our most important calling is to love God with all we are, in all that we say, and in all that we do.

2.) We miss the point whenever Scripture is in our minds but not in our hearts.

This is the point we discussed last week. That is, God's Word cannot exist in our minds alone; it must take root in and completely transform our hearts as well. We examined Scriptures which make clear that the degree to which the Scripture in our heads has indeed been planted in our hearts is seen in our submission to it. In other words, God has given us His Word so that we will obey it; therefore, we cannot truly claim to know it until we are prepared to do our best to obey it. Thus, any true understanding of God's Word will be far more evident in our speech and behavior than it will ever be in our knowledge alone. Otherwise, like the Pharisees, we make ourselves hypocrites who proclaim Scripture with our lips but not with our lifestyles, and we miss the point of Scripture.

You see, God has graciously granted our church a most blessed and exciting mission. As members of First Baptist of Carmi, we believe He is calling us to

bring glory to His magnificent name by reaching out, by welcoming in, by building up, and by sending forth. Therefore, it is my earnest plea that God is affecting your heart such that you more fully understand and embrace this purpose to which we are being called, and I pray that you are walking in the unmitigated joy and eternal treasure that come with it.

Two weeks ago, we discussed why we have been given purpose at all. In essence, we emphasized that God had called us together called to reach out, welcome in, build up, and send forth because these four purposes describe the means by which we fulfill our first and greatest priority to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Then, last week, we focused specifically upon our mission of building up others and being built up in Christ ourselves when we discussed the absolutely centrality of obedience to God's Word.

Our message this morning is about an equally important foundation for our second purpose, which is welcoming in for the glory of God. By this, we mean that God has saved us and called us together so that we will, by His grace, love each other deeply. What a delightfully challenging purpose! And it is my prayer that, through this message today, we will all recognize the exceeding importance of welcoming in, and I pray we will see how easily and egregiously this purpose can be missed. With that in mind, here is the main point today:

3.) We miss the point whenever mercy is missing.

-- Lord of the Rings Clip?

In that clip, I think Gandalf (the wizard) alludes to a truth of fundamental importance, which is this: God has written mercy into the very fabric of all that He wants us to be and all that He calls us to do. In other words, if we are really going to honor God by welcoming in and loving each other deeply, then we must, as Jesus says in Luke 6:36, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*"

This text from Luke 6 that we have been examining provides us with two powerfully instructive incidents of mercy. In them, we see the perfect mercy of Christ set against that of the Pharisees, which we find to be clearly and woefully missing in action.

In the first instance, we once again encounter Jesus and his disciples as they are passing through a grainfield and plucking some grain. As we discussed last week, the fact that the disciples picked the heads of grain was certainly no crime, for one

of the merciful laws of the Old Testament, found in Deuteronomy 23:25, decreed that anyone passing through a grainfield was free to pick the grain so long as he did not put a sickle into it. On any other day, not even the Pharisees would have had a complaint with this behavior. However, this was the Sabbath.

You will recall that, in the first two parts of this message, we observed the outrageous degree to which the Pharisees were fanatical about the Sabbath—not about God mind you, but about the Sabbath—and in their minds, the disciples had sinfully broken it. You see, according to their man-made Sabbath code, by plucking the grain, the disciples were guilty of reaping; by rubbing it in their hands they were guilty of threshing; by flinging away the husks they were guilty of winnowing; and, of course, the very fact that they ate the grain demonstrated that they had sinfully prepared food on the Sabbath. These actions were deadly sins to this group of strict Pharisees. Thus, they skulked around in weeds, spying on Jesus and His disciples, and as soon as they had witnessed the alleged crime, they pounced on Jesus with the question we find in verse two, asking, “[A-HA!] *Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?*”

And as we introduced last Sunday, in response to their complaint, Jesus masterfully refers these Pharisees to an incident from the Old Testament. In particular, He directs their attention the events of 1 Samuel 21:1-6 when David and his famished companions were fleeing for their lives from Saul, and they ate the consecrated bread of the Tabernacle. In specific, Jesus says in verses three and four, “*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.*”

Well, let’s look briefly at that passage today (turn there with me if you like, 1 Samuel 21:1-6), and as we do, recall with me the context. Prior to this passage from, we come to learn that King Saul’s arrogance and jealousy of David had become so pervasive and so evil that he had assembled an army to hunt down David and murder him. Thus, in their attempt to escape the clutches of the murderous King Saul, David and a few of his companions are running away from a place called Gibeah, and, in verse one, this flight for their lives brings them to a place called Nob. Nob was right on the edge of Jerusalem, and it was the place where the tabernacle had been constructed. When David finally arrives there, he and his companions are, it seems, completely famished.

There at the tabernacle, David encounters Ahimelech the priest, with whom he communicates his desperate need for some food, saying in verse three, “*Now then,*

what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.” And in verse 4, Ahimelech responds, “I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.” So David assures Ahimilech that his men were clean, and, in verse six, we read, “So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.”

This bread in question—this holy bread—was known as the Bread of the Presence. Leviticus 24:5-9 stipulated that every Sabbath morning, twelve loaves of bread, baked of wheat flour that had been sieved no fewer than eleven times, were presented before God. There was one loaf for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and these loaves were called the “Bread of the Presence” because they represented the very presence of God in the tabernacle. Therefore, according to Leviticus 24:9, not everyone was allowed to eat this consecrated bread. In fact, only the priests were. However, by pointing to these verses from 1 Samuel 21, Jesus shows the Pharisees an instance in which human need had taken precedence over rules and regulations. He provides them with an inspired example in which mercy trumped formal procedure.

And that is the point that Jesus was making to the Pharisees. He was telling them, in no uncertain terms, that mercy is far more important than ritual, that compassion conquers ceremony. Jesus was commending Ahimelech for understanding the exceeding importance of showing mercy toward those who are truly in need. Jesus was telling those Pharisees that kindness and concern take precedence over procedure. He was trying to get them to understand that, if David could be allowed by a priest to violate a divine regulation, then the disciples could surely be allowed by the Son of God to break a rule that wasn't even in God's Word. Surely human need took precedence over the ridiculous regulation that a person couldn't even take a handful of grain, rub it in his hands, and eat it on the Sabbath.

Yet, the Pharisees didn't get the point; they didn't get it at all. Their thoughts were dominated by the shallow... by the superficial... by the ceremonial. Consequently, Jesus' message to the Pharisees here is really an indictment of their entire system of religion, because the very heart of the Sabbath structure was heavy-handed, hardhearted; it was almost completely devoid of any compassion, grace, mercy, or kindness. In fact, we witness the sinful depths of their unholy religious perspectives in the second half of our passage, where the Pharisees had so terribly missed the real purpose of the Sabbath that they desire in their hearts to kill

Jesus simply because showed kindness to a crippled man on the Sabbath. It seems that, for them, the Sabbath was supposed to be the most excruciatingly merciless day of the week. However, through this incident with David, Jesus emphasizes that the greater law of mercy supersedes the lesser rule of ritual. Certainly, then, Jesus had supreme authority over the Pharisees' self-righteous Sabbath, for He came as the very embodiment of perfect mercy. As He says in verse 5 of our passage, "*The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.*"

All of this adds together to inform us that authentic Christian living must be wholly rooted in the mercy of Christ. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? Think about it. Mercy resides at the very foundation of the new lives we have been given in Christ. Titus 3:4-5 tells us, "*When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, **but because of his mercy.***"

Do we realize today the astonishing centrality of mercy to all that we are and all that we hope to be? It is a devastating exercise to imagine how hopeless, hapless, and helpless our lives would be if not for the mercy that God has shown us through Jesus Christ. Without mercy, we would still be dead in our sins and transgressions, eternally separated from the life of God. We would forever remain objects of His righteous wrath without hope for forgiveness, no chance for change, no possibility of salvation. Do we not realize that every blessing that has ever come, every good thing that presently exists, and every hope for the future has as its foundation one single thing: the mercy of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, as Jesus so compellingly asks in Matthew 18:33, "*Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?*" Since we are the recipients of such tremendous and unmerited mercy, shouldn't mercy freely pour forth from our lives in response? God certainly thinks so. Listen to the heart-piercing words of James 2:13: "*There will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.*" Let there be no confusion on the matter: Authentic Christian living is a life of mercy, and welcoming in means that we wholeheartedly honor the words of Luke 6:36, where Jesus commands us to "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*"

Now, let us look carefully at the second part of our text from Luke chapter 6 (turn back there with me, if you will). In particular, let us read verses six through eleven, and as we do, I think we will see a very enlightening example of the dreadful degree to which the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were missing

the point because their mercy was missing. Read with me as Luke tells us about the incident of a man with a shriveled hand. It says:

On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. ⁷ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. ⁸ 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. 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?" ¹⁰ He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. ¹¹ But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus."

There is a lot we could say about these verses. However, so that we will not also miss the point here, I want to ask you to give just one thing your very best effort this morning. Are you ready? Alright, here it is: Close your eyes with me, if you will, and picture the crippled man from our verses today. Try to visualize his handicapped condition. Do your best to look upon his abnormal appearance. Imagine the difficulty with which he undertakes the common daily chores that most of us take for granted. Listen with me, if you will, to the jeers he as endured. Pay close attention to the derision he has known, and hear the redundant rejections of countless employers who have no use for him. Feel the angst in his spirit and sense the pain in his heart. Heed his cries for mercy, and hear his appeals for help.

And now, with that piteous picture in mind, I want you to look through this man's eyes and peer around at the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law from our verses today. Look at them closely. What do you see? Do you perceive so much any pity in their hearts? Is there any empathy in their expressions? Is there any compassion in their countenance? Do you sense any sympathy in their self-important stares? In fact, if not for their all-consuming desire to catch Jesus and condemn Him, do you think that they would have even noticed this poor man at all? Do they think he worth is their time? Does he merit their concern?

Remember that, in their judgmental eyes, this man's deformity is proof enough that God has rejected him, and, therefore, they offhandedly reject him as well. You see, they don't see him as a man created in the image of God; they cannot begin to fathom that God loves this very man so deeply that He sent His one and only Son to die for Him and for others just like Him. No, for these Pharisees, this

man is not a really a man. Rather, he is more like an opportunity—but not an opportunity for compassionate ministry. No, he was an opportunity for them to gain what they really wanted—power.

Now, if you will, keep your eyes closed, put all of your other thoughts to rest, and imagine with me right now that this very same man is here among us in our congregation today. Can you see him sitting sheepishly in the back row this morning? Can you picture him attempting to conceal the awkward appearance of his shriveled hand? Moreover, can you look beyond his physical appearance and sense the tremendous anxiety he has overcome merely to show up in such a large group of unfamiliar people who might make fun of him or, worse yet, who might ignore him altogether? Can you feel the weight he carries? Can you feel the great burden in his heart?

Now, like we did before, let us once again look through this man's eyes. However, this time, let us not glance around at some 2,000 year-old Pharisees and ancient teachers of the Law—people whom we can scarcely picture. Rather, let us see what this crippled man sees right now as he sits in our midst. Let us look through his eyes peer around at ourselves. Better yet, I believe God wants to bless you this morning by asking you to look through this man's eyes directly upon yourself.

-- Now what do you see?

-- Is there compassion in your eyes, or do they look upon this man with disdain?

-- Does he notice in you an obvious desire to shower him with the love and care of Christ, or is there apathy and indifference in your stare?

-- Does he see in you someone who is sold out to Jesus Christ for the purpose of welcoming in any that God would send, or does he see in you someone who doesn't really want him here because he makes you uncomfortable?

-- Does he find you to be someone who will take the time to greet him and get to know him, or are you ready to bolt out the door the very second the service ends?

-- Does he see in you someone concerned about his needs and his eternal welfare or someone more concerned about the lines at the restaurant?

-- Or... as he looks upon you... do you even notice him at all?

-- Do you even see him sitting there, or are you too consumed with yourself and your ceremony to care?

Can we see the message today? Have we caught the lesson being painted in our verses this morning? Can we see how badly and sadly we miss the point whenever

our mercy is missing? Let me ask you: Are we welcoming in one another as God calls us to do? Are we fulfilling our mission of mercy? Let me ask you: Do the people of this community see God for who He really is in what they see in you and me?

-- Play "For Who He Really Is" by Steven Curtis Chapman

-- Pray