

Luke 5:33-6:11

'The do's and don'ts of following Jesus'



One of the joys of growing older is that you can look back on life with a wry smile, and reflect and reminisce ... a lovely pastime for those of us of a certain era. On a personal note, this year marks my 50th year in fulltime gospel ministry, and I'm so grateful to the Lord for his kindness, his faithfulness, and his hand of blessing down the decades.

In his providence, he has taken this old clay pot around the world to tell people about Jesus. Aside from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, I have many treasured memories of serving the Lord in Latin America, especially in the countries of Chile and Ecuador.

When it comes to Ecuador, I've been there 13 or 14 times, and seen it all - one of the highlights was an opportunity to spend time with the Auca Indians - they're now called the Waorani ... at one point, they were the most savage tribe in the Amazon rainforest. It was to them that Jim Elliot and his four missionary colleagues were

called ... they were passionately keen to reach these stone age warriors with the story of Jesus. We know what happened, don't we - all five men were speared to death on Palm Beach in January 1956. On that day, God planted five seeds ... today, there is a thriving church in that jungle community, among that very same people group. Such is the extravagance of God's grace.

The picture you see on the screen is of three Auca ladies, they're standing on the banks of the Curaray River, on the famous Palm Beach where the five men paid the supreme sacrifice for the sake of the gospel ... the big question is: What do you think the women are doing? I can tell you - they are nit-picking ...!!!

Keep that image in the front of your mind as we open up God's word ... for we're back again this morning in the gospel of Luke ... it's a mini series entitled: 'Introducing Jesus' - last week, when Mark was preaching we were thinking about **the call of Jesus** ... that's when he singled out Levi the tax collector and said to him, 'Follow Me.' Today, it is **the challenge of Jesus!** It's the do's and don'ts of following Jesus!

The gauntlet is thrown down when we see and hear the reaction of Jesus to each of these real-life incidents ... at the end of the day, he left these guys who were devout, who were pillars in the local community, in no doubt that religion,

with all its trimmings, trappings, and tradition, was empty and unfulfilling. It doesn't satisfy! Real life was found in knowing him, fullstop. And two millennia later, that is still the case - religion offers nothing of lasting value, whereas a vibrant and pulsating relationship with Jesus offers you and I everything, both in time and eternity. These verses clearly show us that Jesus is the friend of sinners, be they religious sinners or rogue sinners, be they pious or pagan, be they mixed up or messed up, Jesus reaches out to them ... and the good news is, he's doing that this morning too! Here in Hall Cross School, he's reaching out to you, he has you in his sights. Here we look at Jesus through the eyes of his opponents - it's a bit like Marmite: some people love Jesus for who he is and for all that he does - and let's face it, Jesus is awesome and he does amazing things; others, quite frankly, loathe him, they can't stand him and want nothing to do with him - they find fault at every opportunity. They are nit-pickers! It doesn't matter where you go in today's world, you'll always meet people who think they know better. To be honest, such folk are a real pain in the neck! The truth is, they're not a rare breed; they're not a recent phenomenon. You read the gospel narrative, especially Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and you'll discover these hairsplitters were hyperactive in our Lord's day as well. We bump into them right here when they try to pour cold water on what Jesus is doing. It seems

to me, these strict, stick-to-the-rules folk can't keep their big mouths shut, they can't resist the opportunity to make a barbed comment.

We see exactly where they're coming from when we read what they say to Jesus in verse 33 that 'John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, (then they point their wagging finger at Jesus and say) but yours go on eating and drinking.'

When it came to fasting, they didn't have to do it - the Law of Moses stipulated that the people had to fast one day a year and that was on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most solemn and sacred date in the Jewish religious calendar ... but the Pharisees, what did they do?

Well, these religious fundamentalists raised the bar, for they assigned two days every week to fasting, a Monday and a Thursday. So, instead of doing it once a year which the Law demanded, they were doing it over 100 times a year! That's what you do when you embrace legalism ...

Let me give you **five facts about legalism**: one, you respect God's law but, in your eyes, it isn't enough ... so you make up rules that are not in the Bible - and that's what they did! They developed a system of 613 laws: 365 said, 'thou shalt not' ... 248 said, 'thou shalt.' On top of that, there were volumes of supplementary laws!

**Two**, you make up rules in order to get yourself right with God, you want to curry God's favour and earn his smile of approval. **Three**, you become incredibly proud and elitist - "We're

hungry, our tummies are rumbling, but we're so holy!" **Four**, you condemn people that are not like you. And, **five**, you are always miserable! Let me tell you what they did ... before they missed a meal or two, they did their faces up with a white powder; that gave the false impression to other people that they were feeling a tad under the weather. They had that gaunt and sickly look about them!

Talk about playing to the gallery! That's what these religious fanatics were extremely good at! That's what Jesus roundly condemns them for. He can't stand their hypocrisy. He can't tolerate their double standards.

Jesus isn't against fasting! He doesn't forbid it at all, nor does he see it as an obligatory discipline. From his perspective, there's a time to fast, and there's also a time to feast!

Truth be told, you can weave your way through the Bible and you will find many occasions when God's people fasted for one reason or another. And that's ok; for you and me, fasting is also ok, when we do it with the right motives and for all the right reasons.

Jesus says: 'Look, if you want to go without a meal, that's fine, but don't set yourself up on a pedestal and condemn those who want to keep on eating!' That's a quickie summary of his reply to these blinkered traditionalists.

Verses 34-35 also give us an insight into Calvary. The Lord's comments are a veiled reference to his tragic death on a cross. Yes, the time will

come when Jesus the bridegroom will not be with them any longer. That's the time to fast. The focus here is on the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:8 ... even at a wedding feast, the cross cast a shadow across the banquet hall.

He's with them now, so now is the appropriate hour to celebrate and throw a party and they are his specially invited guests! He tells them he's come to bring grace, to show love and kindness, and to introduce them to the good news of the gospel - he's come to bring life in all its fullness, he's come to liberate them and set them free. He certainly didn't come with a tome of rules and regulations tucked under his belt.

In your life and mine, when we enjoy an intimate relationship with Jesus, when Jesus is our hero, we have every reason to be over the moon. You see, Christianity is not a sob, it's a song. Jesus gives us so much to live for today and something to look forward to in all our tomorrows!

Jesus brings the discussion to a close when he gives them a parable in verses 36-39. What we have here is vintage Jesus. It has a fairly radical touch to it. Jesus seriously questions the wisdom of patching up an old garment with a new piece of unshrunk cloth - it's daft to even think about it; at the same time, he says the man's a fool if he pours new wine into an old brittle goatskin container - he'll end up losing it.

The punchline is simply this: there's a lot to be said for you and I letting go of the old when God is doing something new! Life is better with Jesus.

You see, for us, when we do what Levi or Matthew did in the previous section, and say 'yes' to Jesus when he comes knocking at our door, life takes on a whole new meaning. The old has gone, the new has come!

For the follower of Jesus, for the man or woman who knows the thrill of sins forgiven, life isn't a famine, it isn't a funeral, no, it's a feast! To quote David, we sit down at a table of good things in the wilderness, a spiritual banquet spread with God's blessings.

He does not patch up our old life, and send us on our way with a bit of the old and a bit of the new stitched together. No! When Jesus rescues us and redeems us, he calls us to a praise party dressed in white garments of his righteousness! There's a gladness in knowing Jesus that this world and religion can't offer ... says Peter, it's 'a joy that is inexpressible and packed with glory!' We are more than honoured guests, we are his bride, he is our Groom - therefore, we delight in him as one who is the joy of our hearts. Since Jesus is the new wine, he wants to fill the cup of our lives to overflowing with his grace and for us to be saturated with his Spirit.

The first eleven verses in Luke 6 are all about the Sabbath. Back then, in the first century, Jewish people were defined by three things - one, circumcision; two, their food laws; three, the Sabbath. We have two incidents recorded here, and both happened on a Sabbath day. One was in a field, the second was in the synagogue!

In both instances, surprise, surprise, the ultra conservative Pharisees had a gripe against the Lord Jesus. There's nothing new about that, I can hear you say; it's par for the course, it suits them to blow hot and cold when they want to! Here's the baseline, Jesus divides opinion, always has, always will; the self-righteous Pharisees didn't appreciate what the disciples of Jesus did, and they didn't agree with what Jesus did either.

According to them, Jesus let his disciples away with blue murder. Allied to that, they said, Jesus was guilty of a serious infringement of the law. You see, they looked on Jesus as a threat to their position, they felt he was undermining them at every cut and corner.

The question is, Was he? The answer's a fairly simple one. He wasn't! Well, if that's what Jesus wasn't doing, what on earth was he doing? It seems to me that Jesus is reminding the Pharisees of the priorities of life.

I think what we have here is a valuable lesson on life's perspectives. There's a world of difference between knowing the price of something which you treasure and knowing the value of that same object. And that's the difference between seeing the law as a bridge or a fence!

The first give-away that someone has taken on board a spirit of Pharisaism is seen in their regimented approach to the Bible. It seems to me that is the underlying thought behind verses 1-5. It didn't matter where Jesus went, it didn't matter what he did, these religious extremists

were like wee Jack Russell dogs snapping at his heels. They were stalking him, morning, noon, and night.

They chided the Lord Jesus because his peckish disciples helped themselves to some ears of corn as they walked through the fields. These poor guys were starving, they were really hungry, and all the Pharisees can do is stand there, twiddle their thumbs, and criticise them for doing what they did, when they did it.

It wasn't what they did, that wasn't the problem; there was no infringement of the law at that point. It was when they did it! They did it on the sabbath and that was a non-starter, it was not permissible, so far as they were concerned!

Basically, the Pharisees hijacked the law and, as a result of their extra dictates, the people were hemmed in, the ordinary folk found themselves in a straitjacket. All because these you must dot every I and cross every T puritans were so rigid and unbending when it came to the rulebook.

These guys wrote 39 books on what you could do, and couldn't do, on the Sabbath - each book had 6 sections, so that's 234 chapters. Can you believe it? When it comes to manmade rules, this is seriously OTT and that's why they excelled in the art of nit-picking!

For example, you couldn't tie a knot on the Sabbath, you could only walk a maximum of 1,999 steps - even today, if you've been to Israel, there will be elevators or lifts in hotels or high rise apartments, which are designated as

Shabbat lifts - that is, they stop at every floor on the way up or down! That means Jewish people don't contravene the law by pressing buttons on the Sabbath for that is classed as 'work.'

Let's go back to the field where it's fairly obvious the disciples had trampled on the toes of the Pharisees; apparently, in their eyes, the disciples were guilty of reaping, threshing, winnowing, and grinding - if you like, preparing a meal on the sabbath!

The sabbath was designed to be a special day of rest and refreshment, it was a day set aside for worship and renewal, not for bondage! It was never meant to be a bore or a burden, but a big blessing. The disciples hadn't broken the law of God, they had simply fallen foul of the Pharisees ridiculously stupid regulations. And that was a million times worse!

To knock this one on the head, Jesus appealed to three different people. In verse 3, he appealed to a king, the king being David, from a story in 1 Samuel 21:1-6; in verse 4, he appealed to the priests, they were responsible for offering up the sacrifices in the tabernacle and temple; and in verse 5, he appealed to a prophet, with a quote from Hosea 6:6!

The fact is, if Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, and he is, then he's free to do on it and with it whatever he pleases! They need to remember the Sabbath was his bright idea in the first place. It's what we call, a creation ordinance. I reckon the Pharisees were hit with a triple whammy at this point!

It's interesting to note that Jesus appealed to all three, a prophet, a priest, and a king; the epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that he is prophet, priest, and king! He is great David's greater Son.

It's apparent from the attitude of Jesus that he wants love, not legalism; he puts compassion and human need way above ritual; the temple worship of God was of greater importance than all the laws and bylaws of a bunch of zealots. At the end of it all, the Lord is looking for reality!

The next recorded incident in verses 6-11 shows these guys up for what they really are - it comes across as one that is stage managed because they want to trip Jesus up ... they are cold, and callous, and heartless. Unfeeling and uncaring! There's absolutely no give and take with them; they'll not budge an inch. They're totally inflexible; they've boxed themselves in so tightly, there's no room for manoeuvre. They can't back down, or back out, or even back away.

It's interesting to see that Jesus walked into their trap with his eyes wide open, he did it knowingly and deliberately. We read in verse 8 that 'Jesus knew what they were thinking.' That's when he asked them a leading question and, indeed, a loaded question in verse 9 ... 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?' We know from Mark's account that their silence was deafening.

The man that Jesus meets in the synagogue is in bad shape, his hand is shrivelled, it's withered, it looks a bit of a mess! His hand just did not work!

Guess what? Jesus did what he does best, he healed the man! The man in question, as any right-thinking person would be, was ecstatic! He was on cloud nine! He was fist pumping! He was going around doing high-fives!

I tell you, the Pharisees weren't so well pleased. Again, Jesus had broken their code of do's and don'ts. The bottom line is this, our gracious God desires mercy rather than religious humbug!

That argument didn't go down too well with the Pharisees, it was like a red rag to a bull. They're happy to allow the rescue of a sheep that has fallen into a pit on the sabbath day, but the same crew are less than enthusiastic about restoring health to a human being on the same day!

In the final analysis, the Pharisees are happy to do nothing, except nark at Jesus; Jesus, on the other hand, is keen to do good in spite of what the critics say! What a contrast between them ...

Even more so, when we read verse 11 - they went berserk and from that day forward are putting plans in place to get rid of Jesus. In spite of the miracle they've just witnessed, they connive with each other to murder the Son of God, the Lord of the Sabbath.

These verses reveal to us who Jesus is and why he has come ... he has not come to call good living folks to repentance, but sinners - men and women like you and me ... it's absolutely nothing to do with a raft of rules and regulations ...

it's all about a sparkling, effervescent relationship with Jesus - as Lord of the Sabbath,

he's the one who brings rest to all those who are weary and burdened ... are you weary of your sin, are you tired of the guilt you carry around day by day ... are you burdened with the cares and concerns of life - is the load weighing you down and you're struggling to cope with it all ... the invitation from Jesus in Matthew 11:28 is for you and I to come to HIM and find rest today!