



JESUS HEALS ON THE SABBATH

Part 60 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 14:1-6 | January 30, 2011

Luke 14:1-6

¹ One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" ⁶ And they could not reply to these things.

INTRODUCTION

All right, Mars Hill. Really fantastic, wonderful announcement. I've actually been waiting years to make this one. The latest two books from Re:Lit are out and they're by pastors at the Mars Hill Ballard campus. The Bible says that Jesus is our chief shepherd and that under Jesus are church leaders who are undershepherds and that the church collectively is like a flock and the Christians individually are like sheep and that always looming nearby are wolves. And so it's the job of the shepherd to love the sheep and protect the sheep, to feed the sheep and those that are hurting, to provide help for them. We call that biblical counseling, particularly for those who have been abused and those who are addicted.

This started actually a few years ago, where we were trying to have a comprehensive plan for biblical counseling, to help hurting people. And so Pastor Mike Wilkerson started working on the redemption curriculum that we now use for our redemption books. And his book actually officially releases today. There you are, Pastor Mike. Congratulations. [*Applauding*] So I'm gonna go ahead and have you take a moment, explain the big idea of the book, what you're hoping to accomplish, and what your vision is for it.

PASTOR MIKE WILKERSON

Sure, well, the book is called *Redemption* because it's about, well the subtitle, "Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry." And as we were looking at how do we help all the people here at Mars Hill who are hurting both from the wounds of abuse and all kinds of other suffering, also people who are enslaved to habitual sin, addiction, this idea of slavery that both of those groups of people could say, "Yeah, it feels like slavery." And what we want them to know is that Jesus provides freedom from all kinds of sin, all kinds of suffering. In fact, one redemption group participant who read an early copy of this, he opened it up and found —this is about the Exodus. This is about the Bible's backstory for redemption in Jesus. He said, "I open that up, I saw this is about slavery. It was exactly where I was at." This is a guy who has those wounds from past abuse and had been enslaved in habitual sin, who's saying, "That's exactly where I'm at." And we want to help people who are enslaved in all kinds of situations to know true freedom in Christ. And so that's what the book is about. It's a journey through the Exodus, freedom from slavery. It's interwoven with stories from a lot of people who've been in the groups and even some leaders of our groups. And our vision is to equip lots and lots of people with the gospel in their own lives, but also leaders that will help others in community at Mars Hill, throughout our community, and also at churches around the world.

Seriously, buddy, fantastic work.

Thank you.

Very, very glad to finally have this.

PASTOR JUSTIN HOLCOMB

And with that, like two barrels in a gun, we're releasing a second book at the same time. This is Pastor Justin Holcomb. You guys could step forward. They all want to see the baby if at all possible. She's cute. And this is his wife, Lindsey. They're both leaders here at the church and they have as well a book that's releasing this week, *Rid of My Disgrace*, and it is a hope, help, and healing for those who have been sexually assaulted. And so Justin's got a PhD in theology and comparative religion and a couple of master's degrees. He was a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia. We're glad to have him running *The Resurgence*. And he's got the background on the clinical side and then Lindsey has the history on the caseworker's side, having been a caseworker and case manager for a rape crisis clinic. And so why don't you tell a little bit about your book and then we'll hear from Lindsey as well?

The purpose for the book is it's written to victims of sexual assault. It's not about them, but to them. 'Cause there's too many books that kind of go big picture and just kind of talk about the issue. And we realized, we need to connect the dots between who Jesus is and what he did on the cross, and the grace that comes from that, to the disgrace of sexual assault and the horror that people experience from the sense of denial and shame and guilt and anger and despair. What does Jesus' life, death, and resurrection mean for someone who experienced that? And so it was a—the book came out of me as a seminary professor, when Lindsey and I first started dating, that she started just handing me all of her books on this issue and telling me stories. And so we just started together thinking through this. And so it's a—we're thrilled to have this. This has been two years or so from when we first met, talking about this book. And it clicks in really nicely. I mean, we wrote these books together because redemption is the overarching kind of framework for Jesus and what it means for hope and healing. And then this is the book that clicks in under that framework and for that specific issue of sexual assault for victims, but also those who are supporting them. We wanted the people who know victims, maybe their spouse, their children, to overhear how we are applying the gospel to their situation, and hopefully learn how to care for them in a biblical, practical, and helpful way.

And how many people have this as a real issue in their life, men and women, sexual assault?

The numbers are one in four women and one in six men will be or have been victims of sexual assault in their lifetime.

And the younger the audience, the higher the percentages?

Yeah, the horrible numbers are that between twelve and nineteen is the sweet spot of horror, is that that's where a lot of the victims are; sixteen- to nineteen-year-old women are the highest numbers of victims.

So give me the percentages for all women.

Twenty-five percent.

So if we have got on a really good Sunday, let's say on Easter we hit, by God's grace, sixteen thousand people. Let's say half of those are female, eight thousand. Twenty-five percent of those would still be a megachurch, two thousand people, just female sexual assault victims.

Yes.

At Mars Hill Church. Still a megachurch.

Yes. And you can do the same thing—I mean, if it's one in six men, it's almost the same for men. And frequently what happens is people think, "women's issue." But if there's one out of six men or—

That's men who will report it.

Yeah, 'cause out of the shame that—I mean, almost no men report out of the shame of thinking, "What about my sexuality? What does this mean for me? Who's gonna believe me? Like they'll probably think I liked it." And so there are so many different reasons why a man would never report what happened to him.

Well, it's been a huge issue at Mars Hill, so we're really thankful for your guys' work and we'll hear from Lindsey last. And I know a lot of the content of the book and the framework of the book came from your own practical ministry experience. So maybe give us the backstory on that.

DEACON LINDSEY HOLCOMB

Sure, well, a couple of things I did at the sexual assault crisis center is I led a Bible study at a prison, a maximum security prison. And those women are the ones that taught me so much of the information that's in the book. A lot of the issues we cover of denial and anger are things that we thought we needed to really focus on. So a lot of their stories and experiences, we worked off of to be able to address in the book. So they were instrumental in helping to write this book for sure.

What was it like writing a book with your husband?

It was hard. It was wonderful and hard at the same time.

'Cause it seems like you might have been pregnant at the time as well.

I was—this one was in the belly, so I was very tired and sick all the time. But it was fun to be able to work off each other's strengths and weaknesses and figure out how to write the book, how to actually format a chapter and get the words flowing. But once we got the flow, it was actually fun.

And what do you hope to have happen as a result of the book? What are you praying for?

I just hope it gets into the hands of everyone that needs it. Those that are hurting, that are victims, and then those that can hopefully come alongside the victims and be a voice of hope and say the right things, and that's stuff we address in the book, what to say and what not to say, for sure.

Well, we love you guys. We're very, very thankful for all of your work. And I'm gonna ask you, Lindsey, could you just close us in prayer, prayer for Mike's book, prayer for your book, prayer for the ministry that you guys have together, a lot of the counselors that we're training here at Mars Hill and around the world, and the victims who need the help.

Jesus, we just thank you for these books that have just finally arrived. And we just pray for the people that are gonna receive them. I just pray that victims will receive this book on their own or that friends and family will give them to them and that they will read these words and that these words will be hope, that they would be words of hope and healing, that they will see that Jesus is the only hope for the abuse and the addiction and just the hurt that is in their lives. And so we just ask that you will bless the words that are in these books and we just pray for those that are caring for victims. We pray for pastors and teachers and caseworkers and counselors just across the nation and internationally, that they will just be encouraged, that you will protect them from doubt and anxiety and just lies, that you will just fill them with hope that Jesus is our only hope for healing. And so I thank you for the opportunity to be able to write this book and I just pray that you will just bless just everybody that reads it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Love you guys. Thank you guys. All right. *[Applauding]*

MORE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

And now the bad part. Luke 14:1–6, more religious people. This week you're gonna see Jesus heals on the Sabbath. What happens is Jesus helps those who are hurting and religious people criticize his compassion. It's unbelievable. It keeps happening. And for those of you who are new, find Luke 14 in your Bible or on your app. But here's where we find ourselves. We're taking about two years to go through the Gospel of Luke. We love the Bible, the Bible's all about Jesus. Luke is one of the sixty-six books of the Bible and it's a historical biography of Jesus Christ, where he went, what he taught, what he did, how people responded to him. We looked early on in the book that it was funded by a wealthy benefactor named Theophilus. Luke is a medical doctor and historian who, because of a generous financial gift, is allowed to spend a considerable amount of time traveling, interviewing people, and asking them, "So what did Jesus teach? What did he do for you? How did he heal you? What exactly transpired when he was doing his ministry here on earth before his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension back into heaven?" He faithfully records that.

And one thing we keep seeing over and over and over is conflict between Jesus and religious people. It happens over and over and over in Luke's gospel. And I believe there is a reason why Luke keeps emphasizing this. Number one, the default mode of the human heart, as Martin Luther said, is religion. We're all prone to go toward religion. And in varying ways, at varying times, to varying degrees, we're all religious. And so when we read about religious people, we can't simply criticize them. We also need to examine ourselves.

Secondly, in a day when people don't have deep convictions, deep passions, deep commitments, it is intriguing and compelling to meet people who will die for their cause, who give their finances to their cause, who are willing to take a stand publicly, who are willing to get into a fight, who've memorized a few verses of the Bible and seem very convinced. Those people can be very compelling. But we see that they're committed to the wrong cause. Because, ultimately, they're opposing Jesus Christ.

RELIGION WANTS A FIGHT

And we find yet another case study today where very devout, very bold, very committed, very organized religious people mount an attack on Jesus himself. And here it begins in Luke 14:1, where we see that religion wants a fight. If you had to choose one icon to defend religion, I think a clenched fist would be the best one. They're always looking for a fight, criticism, what's wrong, contentious, battle, always ready to have conflict. And so, here again, they're going to pick a fight with Jesus. We read, "One Sabbath, when he," that is, Jesus, "went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully." We'll unpack this.

Okay, here's Jesus and he gets invited to dinner by the leader of a group of Pharisees. Now the Pharisees were very conservative religious people. There's two ways to get into great trouble. Number one is every issue, just take the liberal side. Or every issue, just take the conservative side. Those are the two ways to get into trouble. This group decided, "On every issue, we'll just take the most conservative side." You and I need to take every issue, go to the Bible, and say, "I don't want to be liberal. I don't want to be conservative. I want to be biblical." And sometimes that may mean that we take a position that's a bit more liberal, sometimes a bit more conservative.

They just kept taking on every issue the most conservative option. And ended up becoming religious neatniks. They ended up becoming rule-makers outside of Scripture. And they ended up attacking Jesus Christ. The Pharisees also were not professionals theologically. They were like you, they had jobs. These are people who self-organized and they had, you'll meet 'em in a moment, what they called lawyers, experts in the Old Testament law. So I would be like a lawyer and you'd be like the Pharisees.

And according to Josephus, who is a noteworthy, incredible, ancient Jewish historian, there weren't a lot of them. Maybe six thousand Pharisees in the New Testament era of the first century. And what's curious is that's not a lot of people. That's less people than we have at Mars Hill. But it shows you that religious critics and neatniks who want to pick a fight and organize and are devoted to their cause can create a whole lot of trouble. That's why we keep seeing them throughout the storyline of Luke.

And they show up in the weirdest places. Jesus is walking from Galilee to Jerusalem over the course of many months, he's out in the middle of nowhere in a field and it says the Pharisees were there. Like they teleported in. These guys are stalkers, they're just following him around. Religious people love to keep an eye on everyone else. And now in the age of the Internet and Facebook and Twitter and blogs, they're worse than ever. Keeping an eye on everyone and everything, always looking for a fight. It's a religious attitude.

It's saying this as well, there's a conflict that keeps happening between Jesus and the religious leaders over the issue of the Sabbath. One of their primary issues was the Sabbath, and the Sabbath is that in six days, God worked, and on the seventh day, a Saturday, God rested. So God set in motion a seven-day week with a day of rest. That's the big idea.

Now these religious neatniks, they added to that lots and lots of rules. And Jesus is breaking some of their rules. None of the rules of the Bible, but definitely some of their traditions. And so they have recurring conflict over the Sabbath. And it really is—underneath all of Jesus' conflict with the religious people are two big issues. Number one, where does authority reside? For the Pharisees, the religious people, it was what they would call Torah and tradition, meaning the Old Testament and tradition. And they would put them essentially side by side. So in addition to the Bible, there are teachers and commentators and history and traditions and rules and regulations. And a committee got together and guys educated beyond their intelligence voted and a guy with a big hat made it look official and they wrote it in a book and so it has to just be that way. It looked very official.

Jesus keeps arguing just for Torah, not for tradition, asking, "Haven't you guys read your Bible? Don't you know what the Bible says? The Bible doesn't say that. You know, your teacher does, but not the book that I inspired to be written." This is like Catholicism and Orthodoxy within Christianity. They would say that, in addition to the Bible, there is tradition. The Protestant Reformation instead taught *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone is our highest authority. For us, the Bible is over all other authorities, tradition, reason, human experiences, all beneath the highest authority of Scripture. We don't dismiss church history and theologians. In fact, we appreciate them very much. But we test everything by Scripture and we don't lie alongside of the Bible anyone whose name is not in the Bible. They go under the Bible.

The second point of conflict was not just where does authority reside, but number two, what company should you keep? Jesus as God comes to earth and starts hanging out with people who are sinners. And the religious people freaked out. In other places, they say he's a glutton and a drunkard and a friend of sinners. Look at the company that he keeps! Because see, religious people tend to think that sin is caught like a cold. "Oh, you're a sinner? Well, I better keep a little distance so I don't catch your sin." Sin is not caught like a cold. Jesus is the great physician coming to help and to heal and to serve sinners. And they criticized him. "Look at Jesus, all he ever does is hang out with sinners." Jesus says, "Yeah, it's 'cause I'm a doctor." It's like a doctor only hangs out with sick people, he's trying to help.

Jesus was not a drunkard, Jesus was not a glutton, but he was and is a friend of sinners. He's a friend of mine and I'm a sinner and I'm really glad he doesn't mind being friends with sinners. And their attitude was that we need to separate from the world. We need to separate from the culture. We need to separate from our neighbors. We need to separate from sinners. And Jesus had the attitude of a missionary. So he's hanging out with people, he's going to dinner at their house, he's befriending them, he's opening his life to them, he's living in community with them. So the big debate was where does authority reside and what kind of company should you keep? And they kept picking a fight with Jesus, and of course he kept winning the fight. But they don't give up, they don't give in.

And so here, on a Sabbath, he gets invited to the home of a Pharisee. What I find amazing: he went. That's amazing to me. I would not go. Like if you argued with me for thirteen chapters of my life and kept picking a fight in public and never apologized and asked, "Hey, Pastor Mark, could you come over for dinner?" My answer would be, "No." Some of you are like, "That's why he didn't return my email." Exactly. That's why. Right, this is a setup. These are his enemies. All they ever do is just give him grief. And he accepts the invitation. And he goes 'cause Jesus loves everybody, Jesus serves everybody, Jesus is good to everybody, even his enemies.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH RELIGIOUS PEOPLE?

So what's wrong with religious people? Well, there are thousands of things, but for the sake of time, we will examine eight. What's wrong with religious people?

Number one, they are negatives defined by what they are against. We see that over and over and over with the Pharisees. "Jesus, we're against your view of the Sabbath. Jesus, we're against your view of the Sabbath. Jesus, we're against your view of the Sabbath. Oh, and while we're at it, we're against your friends. We're against the people who hang out with. We're against what you do when you're traveling and how you conduct yourself. We're against all of that." They're negatives who define themselves by what they're against.

Be careful because, see, again, when we live in this day, when people don't have strong convictions and real commitment, a person who's negative and is always shooting and criticizing and defining themselves by what they're against, they can be very compelling. But they're also just very negative. It's better to be known primarily about what you're for than what you're against. To be sure, there are things we have to be against like sin, but the truth is, most of our energy should be devoted to not just what we're for, but who we're for. Are you negative? Are you critical? You always got a fist ready to go. Everything you read, everything you hear, everywhere you go, you're looking for what's wrong so that you can point it out and pick a fight. You're on the road to religion.

Number two, they are single-issue voters. They miss everything 'cause they're obsessed with one thing. Right, for these guys, what's their issue? It's the Sabbath. They keep fighting with Jesus over the Sabbath, over and over and over. I was thinking about it when I was preparing this sermon, I was like, "Not another fight over the Sabbath." This is like part 5 million in the book of Luke. I've preached this sermon already a whole bunch of times. And then it hit me. This is a tactic of religious people. They don't change the topic. They don't change their mind. They just try and wear you out. So that you reach the point you're like, "You're wrong, but I'm gonna agree with you just so you leave me alone." That's how religious people work. That's how religious people work. They're single-issue voters.

They could have talked to Jesus about all kinds of very interesting things. "Hey, Jesus, you water-ski without a boat. What's that like? You fed a

stadium with a little boy's Lunchable. That was pretty awesome. How did you do that? Hey, Jesus, what's heaven like? What's an angel like? Am I going to hell?" I would ask questions like that. Instead, it's like, "What do you do on Saturdays? Do you work or not work?" What's interesting, these guys arguing with Jesus about working on the Sabbath, what are they doing? They're kind of working on the Sabbath. They devise a plan to have him over, to jump him, argue with him, set him up, and exhaust him because he's gonna work. Well, he's only working 'cause you're fighting with him. You'll get it later. But that's a very important point.

Number three, they preach but they don't practice repentance. These are the religious people that are like, "You need to knock it off and you need to knock and you need to stop it and you guys are all wrong and this is deplorable." And they don't themselves repent. They never say, "I'm wrong. I'm sorry. My fault. I'm an idiot." What they say is, "Well, you have things to work on. And I'm gonna point them out to you because I'm the holy one and you're the unholy one." And you'll see it even in the story in a moment, Jesus proves 'em wrong and here's what it says. They remained silent. You know what they should've done? Apologized. But religious people can't do that. They're unwilling to do that, to say, "I'm wrong."

Here's what happens if you catch a religious person, if they say something that's not true or they're wrong and you correct them, then they attack your character personally. They try to shift the subject from their sin to your character. They're gonna try that with Jesus. Jesus doesn't have any sin. They're still gonna try it. You and I need to practice saying, "I'm sorry. I'm wrong. That was sin. No excuse. Not your fault. Something wrong with me." If you're a religious person, you're always like this, you should just punch yourself in the face, right? You punch everybody else, may as well just be fair about it. Religious people preach repentance, they don't practice it.

Number four, they prefer tidy answers over messy lives. Now, I could tell you this, being a pastor for a while, people's lives are complicated. And what happens to religious people, they live in their mind. They're all up in their head. They like to get everything down in charts and in manuals with rules and footnotes so that they don't have to actually deal with people. It's just, "Well, see page 47. Yeah, it's over here in the manual in page 47. There are three verses and two things to do. Yeah, the committee voted. Everybody was in a suit. It was totally official. Page 27, just do what the manual says." People's lives are messy. People's lives are complicated. People's lives are sometimes devastated and you can't just say, "Here are three verses and check the manual." You got to get to know the person, their life, their backstory, their family, their history, the circumstances, hear the other side, take it to the Bible, get wise counsel, prayerfully consider what the best answer is for them. Religious people are lazy when it comes to human suffering. I said it, I mean it.

So these guys have an answer for everything. And one of their answers is, "We don't heal on the Sabbath." Jesus starts healing on the Sabbath. "Oh, that doesn't work with our manual." Jesus says, "I didn't write that manual. I don't care if the guys in suits or hats took a vote. Someone's suffering, I'm gonna serve them. I like to help hurting people," Jesus would say. "I don't care what the manual says. By the way, I wrote my own book."

I had this, not long ago, it just drove me cuckoo for cocoa puffs. This gal, I'm talking to her. She comes from this church that's real religious and the pastors there just decided, "We're gonna have a position on divorce. No Christians can ever get divorced." Hoo, glad that's over. Really, it's that simple? You had a meeting and settled divorce for everyone for the rest of their life? "Yeah, we think divorce is bad." Even divorced people will tell you divorce is bad. But sometimes, because of unrepentant, habitual sin, not that we want everybody to get divorced, but sometimes the Bible does say there are some good reasons why it should be a possibility.

So this poor gal, her husband commits adultery on her, beats her, sexually assaults her, and now is starting to do the same thing to her daughters. And the pastors say, "Well, it says in the manual. We're on page 28. No divorce, we took a vote. We're all wearing suits. It was very official." If you want to have an abusive situation, make one person obey the Bible and not the other. That's gonna be abusive. So she comes, she says, "Well, what do I do?" I said, "Well, the Bible talks about husbands, don't be harsh with your wives. Thou shalt not commit adultery is in here somewhere. In addition, husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the church. Jesus says in the case of adultery, divorce is not required, but it's permissible. And your children are getting harmed and your daughters are getting assaulted. Yeah, you probably shouldn't go home to that guy."

See, people's lives are messy. And religion just wants to keep it tidy. But if you're really gonna help hurting people, you need more than a manual, you need the Holy Spirit, wisdom, discernment, community, patience, time, and prayer. That's why they keep fighting with Jesus. He's not reading the lines out of the manual they wrote. It's because they're wrong.

Number five, they convert believers, not unbelievers. Jesus keeps talking to people who don't necessarily have a relationship with a living God yet. The religious people, throughout the course of the book, they're talking to people who already believe in God. So Jesus saves people and then religious people try and recruit 'em for their team to be against Jesus. Cults, legalists, hardcore Christian fundamentalists tend not to have a lot of new Christians. They tend to take Christians and recruit them on their team to fight against other Christians. That's not where our energies are to be going. Our energies should be going toward people who don't know Jesus. We want 'em to meet Jesus, not just recruit the people who already do know Jesus to fight against the other people who know Jesus. That's what's going on here. Jesus is saving people and they're trying to steal them. That's why they keep picking their fights publicly, to steal his followers.

Number six, they use fear of man to bully and exhaust people. This is why the religious people keep picking fights in public with an audience. And it's horrible. It wouldn't be so bad if they went up to Jesus and said, "Jesus, we disagree. But since you're the maker of heaven and earth and were born of a virgin, maybe we're wrong. Your resume's fairly impressive." So rather than fighting about this publicly—and praise God they didn't have blogs at this point—they could've gone to Jesus and said, "Okay, could we sit down and talk about this? Maybe we could do a Bible study with you? You seem like a really good Bible teacher. Could we work this out with you privately rather than publicly?" there wouldn't have been a problem. But no, they're gonna pick a fight publicly. And they're gonna bully people. They're gonna seek to push people around. They're gonna work through fear of man by making it a public issue.

Some of you are religious and you're like that. You talk about people, not to them. You pick fights in public. You don't pursue in private. You're on the road to religion. And be careful you don't get sucked in, blogs, Tweets, Facebook posts, whatever it is, don't get sucked in to all the religious drama.

Don't go negative. And don't let people exhaust you and bully you around. Some of you have already been bullied. You believe something, but you've gotten criticized enough, you've taken a few steps back, and you know it's right, but you're just cowardly.

Number seven, they confuse principles and methods. This is really important. The Bible has a whole bunch of fantastic, perfect, timeless principles and gives us freedom, according to conscience, community, and the Holy Spirit to come up with methods, right? Because circumstances, resources, cultures, different methods. Same principle. So the Bible says, "Sing to the Lord." What songs? What music? What order? What style? Doesn't say. Doesn't say. "Parents, train your children." What kind of educational model? Well, doesn't say. There are a few options.

So what we want to be is really, really strong on the principle and really, really, really flexible on the method. And this is where religious people get confusing 'cause when they start arguing, they'll start arguing for their principle and you're like, "I agree with that. That's biblical." And then they'll flip it to say, "Therefore, if you believe this principle, there's only one method. You have to do it the way we do it." Oh, wait a minute. That's where I get off the bus. One principle, many methods. Have your methods, have your convictions, live your life according to your conscience, and allow others to do the same if they are likewise faithful to the timeless biblical principle.

Now again, they're not gonna give that grace toward Jesus. They and Jesus agree that the Sabbath should be adhered to and it's a gift of God. They've got a lot of strict rules, Jesus doesn't obey all of their strict rules, they want not just to agree on the principle, they want him to conform to their method.

And number eight, they labor to set the agenda and change the mission. Jesus' mission is to get from Galilee to Jerusalem, to go to a cross and die for the sin of the world. That's his agenda and mission. They're trying to subvert his mission. They want him to respond to them, to argue with them, to fight with them, to join their team, to back their cause. They're trying to get him off his divine mission. And this is where religious people—and I tell you this, Mars Hill, with so much passion. We have this magnificent opportunity to see people meet Jesus, to grow in Jesus, to see more churches get planted. And religious people could divert all of that to where we're responding to them rather than the Holy Spirit and we're getting tangled up in their nefarious mission rather than God's glorious mission. And they keep trying to sidetrack and hijack Jesus' time, his energy, his joy.

JESUS WANTS A FRIEND

So let's look at what happens. Here's the story. Whereas religious people want to fight, Jesus wants a friend. The icon for Jesus that I would give you throughout the totality of Luke's gospel is that his hand is always out, he's trying to be loving, gracious, truthful, friend to everyone, even his enemies. Jesus is open-handed, welcoming. Religious people are closed-handed, contentious.

And here's the story. "And behold," Luke 14:2–6, "there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers," so that would be a guy like me, "and the Pharisees," that'd be a group of people perhaps like some of you, "saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?' But they remained silent." Don't you love that? "Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, 'Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?' And they could not reply to these things."

This is a total set up! "Hey Jesus, you want to come over for dinner?" Oh yeah, this will be awesome. "Okay, we got it all set up. Go get Dropsy Dan. Go get Dropsy Dan, wheel him in here, put him in a chair. We'll have Jesus sit here and across from Jesus we'll have Dropsy Dan. Dropsy Dan, we want you to look as miserable as possible. If you could cry, that would be awesome. Keep moaning, ahhhhh! And say things like, 'I can't handle this another minute. I need relief right now.' Okay, Dropsy Dan, here's what we need you to do. Look miserable, moan a lot, cry a little. Be awesome. Okay. Okay, then here's what we're gonna do. We're all gonna sit in a circle and we're gonna sit Jesus right here. And we know Jesus can't help but serve people and love them. This will trap him."

Now this is pretty twisted, right? Would you agree? And, also, their whole argument is you're not supposed to work on Saturday. Is it just me or does this seem like a bit of work? Moving right along, what happens is they bring in Dropsy Dan and Jesus sits down and it's a total set up. And here's where they work through fear of man. And I love Jesus. Jesus is not a coward. He goes into the meeting, as far as we can tell, by himself. This is pretty amazing.

And he sits down and he sees Dropsy Dan. And they're all thinking, "We got him. He kept beating us on all of our Sabbath arguments, but we got him. If he heals Dropsy Dan, he's ours." And it says that they were watching him closely. That's what it said in verse one. So they were all giving him the stink eye and leaning over their chair. I see guys in suits with clipboards, right? Like, "Is he gonna heal him? Is he gonna heal him? Is he gonna heal him? We got him now."

And so Jesus asks them a question, fantastic. "Let me ask you a question. Is it a sin to heal on the Sabbath?" Oh, they weren't expecting a question. And now they're left on the horns of a terrible dilemma. "If we say, 'Yes, it's a sin to heal on the Sabbath,' we look pretty mean." Again, because religious people like tidy answers, not messy lives. "Yeah, we can't really be the anti-healing crowd, right?" Nobody has a bumper sticker on their camel like, "We're against healing." Like, really? You're gonna die on that hill? That's probably not gonna be real good.

But if they say, "Yeah, you can heal on the Sabbath," then what Jesus is saying is, "Go ahead and burn that little book that you guys wrote when you got together with the guy in the big hat and took a vote 'cause the rules you made and the manual you wrote, it just doesn't work." Now the Bible does, but their book doesn't.

So do they deny all of their religion and tradition and all of their rules and all the junk they've committed their life to? Or not? And what does it say?
"They remained silent." I hope Jesus left that for like twenty minutes, just that awkward . . .

So then he asks them this story. "Okay, let's say it's Saturday. You're walking along, you got a nice, expensive, helpful ox. Ox falls into a hole. Do you help the ox out or not? How about another one? You've got a son who's fallen into a well on a Saturday. So you're out—" no, you couldn't be playing Frisbee with your kid 'cause it's the Sabbath. I don't know how your kid fell in the well on the Sabbath. They're not allowed to do anything. But hypothetically, your kid fell in a well on the Sabbath. "So your kid—you're like, 'Hey, oh!' And you hear Johnny, 'Ahhhh!' Plunk. 'Oh, Johnny! Are you okay?' 'Yeah, Dad.' 'Tomorrow, I will give you a rope, Johnny, tomorrow. Your dad's a Pharisee and if I turn the crank, that'll be Sabbath work. And guys in a suit took a vote and there's this book that God did not write. Yes, Johnny, I am an idiot. Yes, thank you. Tomorrow, Johnny. You should have fallen in on Thursday, Johnny. I'm sorry we did not get you swim lessons. I am sorry, Johnny.'" Right? It's pretty fantastic. Jesus is like, "Would you turn the crank and send the bucket down to the kid?" "Yeah." "Well, wouldn't that violate page 27 in the manual?" "Yeah." "So maybe the manual is wrong." They remained silent. "Hmm, well, we won't talk about this."

So what does Jesus do? He heals Dropsy Dan. I love this. Dropsy Dan doesn't ask. He's not like, "Jesus, please help me." He doesn't get up and come toward Jesus. Now dropsy here is a medical condition diagnosed by Luke the physician. This is where your body is retaining lots of water and you're swelling. And as a result, it gets hard to move and your joints ache and you start to have organ failure as the pressure collapses on your organs. This is a painful, slow, horrible way to die. And Jesus heals Dropsy Dan.

And how he heals him is a picture of our own salvation. Dropsy Dan doesn't say anything, he doesn't do anything. Jesus does it all. It's just like us. We sit there, just in this condition of sin that leads to death and Jesus comes and touches us and gives us new life. It's a great picture of salvation.

And then Jesus does something wonderful. He tells him, "Leave." This is a double gift. "You're healed. Run for your life!" Dropsy Dan's like, "Woohoo! I'm healed and I get to leave the Pharisees. What a fantastic day this is."

And in this story, would you agree Jesus loved the guy with dropsy? He really did. And Jesus also loved the Pharisees. He had a meal with 'em, he talked to 'em, he put up with their nonsense, he served 'em. See, this is how good Jesus is. Jesus loves and serves everybody. Again, they come with a clenched fist, he comes with an open hand.

IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR RELIGIOUS PEOPLE?

And I was trying to figure out, "Okay, how am I gonna teach this and not have this be just another negative sermon?" Right? 'Cause part of it is it is pretty fun to make fun of religious people and we do it in love because it helps them. No, it does, seriously. Religious people take themselves way too seriously. And so we make fun of them because we love them. We invite them to laugh at themselves. Now, they don't always laugh with us, but that makes it even funnier sometimes.

But how do we have this sermon not just be, "We're good. They're bad. They're funny. They don't know it. We do?" 'Cause if that happens, we're just a new kind of religious, right? "We're holier than you, we're better than you 'cause you're ridiculous and we make fun of you." The truth is that we all have ways, times, degrees to which we're religious. We just do. We get there, we go there. We always got to be reminded of the gospel, reminded of Jesus. I think that's why Luke keeps working in the story of conflict with the religious people, 'cause it's something that's also a recurring issue in our life.

So is there any hope for religious people? Is there? There is. I was thinking and praying about it this week and I felt like the Holy Spirit wanted me to share a story with you from the Bible. Luke wrote this biography of Jesus and he writes the sequel, the book of Acts, which is the biography of the early church. And what really dominates the book of Luke is the story of the life of Jesus. What really dominates the book of Acts is the story of the life of a man who was named Saul and his name changed to Paul. He tells of him overseeing the execution and murder of an early church deacon. He shows that Jesus came down from heaven in Acts 9 to save Saul and to turn him into a missionary to non-Jews, Gentiles.

Chapter 22 of Acts, he includes the lengthy account of Paul's own testimony of God's work in his life. Does the same thing in the first half of Acts 26. Luke and Paul were really good friends. They're the two major, primary contributors to the New Testament. Luke wrote the most content, Paul wrote the most books. And you know what? They're friends. They travel together, they work together, they journey together. I think Luke may have even been Paul's personal physician 'cause Paul had some real major health complications. And you know what's interesting? Luke, who writes this, he was a Gentile and Paul was a Jew.

And God had to do a massive work in Paul's life to get him to be a different kind of man who was not religious. And he went on to preach, to teach boldly. Paul is one of the most influential men in the history of the world and that's not an overstatement. He traveled up to eighteen miles a day on foot. He preached, he was shipwrecked, beaten, homeless, left for dead, stoned, adrift on the sea. He says, "I bear the marks of Jesus on my body." His body looked like Jesus' on the way to the cross. He was passionate. He was committed. He was relentless. He was zealous, but for the right cause. Love, grace, mercy, Jesus. Not law, rules, and religion. John Chrysostom, the early church father, says it this way. "Put the whole world on one side of the scale and you will see that the soul of Paul outweighs it." Paul started as a Pharisee. In the story of Paul, we have hope even for the most religious.

Paul tells us his own story in Philippians 3. He says it this way. "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more." Here's what he's saying. "You religious people, you really think you're moral, you think you're good, you think you're devout. You did the good things. You didn't do the bad things. You think you're really holy, special? I'm better than you." That's what he's saying. "I'm better than you. I'm more moral than you. I'm more religious than you."

Then he shares with us his resume. "Circumcised on the eighth day." That was required. "Of the people of Israel," a Jew all the way back to Abraham. "Heard about him? Yeah, he's to the left. He's a big deal. I descend from Abraham," he says. "Of the tribe of Benjamin." Oh, a very important family, again, in the Bible. It's pretty cool when your family's in the concordance. That's pretty awesome. "A Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law," a what? "Pharisee," which is the same group that kept ankle-biting Jesus. "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church." Actually murdered at least one Christian, incarcerated others, harmed others, damaged others. This guy is really committed to his cause. "As to righteousness under the law, blameless." How many of you would not put that on your business card? "Hi, my name is Harriet, and as to the law, I am blameless." That's a lot, right? That's a rule-keeper right there.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." You know what? He says, "And that used to matter to me till I met Jesus. "That used to actually impress me till I met Jesus. That used to actually motivate me till I met Jesus." "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Here's the truth. Jesus Christ is Lord! The question is, is he my Lord? Paul says, "Not only is Jesus Christ Lord, he's my Lord. He's the one I worship. He's the one I live for. He's my savior. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish." That's a word—some of your translations will say "garbage" or "feces" or "excrement." It's actually a loaded, pretty nasty word 'cause that's what religion is, a pretty nasty thing. And I've told you before, but I'll repeat it, next time you go out in the yard or you're at the park and you see a big steaming pile, think religion. It's exactly what he's saying. Paul used to say, "Oh, I was really impressed with my pile. And then I met Jesus and I realized it wasn't as big of a deal as I was expecting."

"In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him," that's what it's all about is knowing Jesus. "And the power of his resurrection," that's the power of the Holy Spirit. "And may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Paul says, "If you think religion is going to satisfy, let me tell you from my own life example, it's garbage. Religion is ridiculous."

And see, religion is seeking to answer a very important question, and that is, how can we who are unholy and unrighteous be declared holy and acceptable in the sight of a holy and righteous God? That's a very good question. Religion asks the right question and provides the wrong answer. So religion rightly ascertains: God is holy and righteous. We're unholy, unrighteous sinners. We deserve death, hell, judgment, wrath, condemnation. How can we be declared righteous, made holy in the sight of God? That's a very good question. And they provide the wrong answer. They say, "What should we do to make ourselves holy? What should we do to make ourselves righteous?" And they miss Jesus, who makes them holy and makes them righteous. And they build traditions and rules and regulations in an effort to perform their way to pleasing God.

Theologically, this is the doctrine of justification. How can a sinner be declared righteous in the sight of God? Paul says it this way, and I've shared it with you guys many times and it's perhaps my favorite verse in the whole Bible, it's 2 Corinthians 5:21. Paul says it this way, "God made him who knew no sin," Jesus. God became a man, lived without any sin whatsoever. "God made him who knew no sin to become sin," that's on the cross, Jesus took upon himself my sin, our sin. "God made him who knew no sin to become sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Martin Luther calls this the great exchange. Jesus lives without sin, goes to the cross to take my place for my sin, all of my sin goes to Jesus. He's my substitute. He pays my debt of death. And he rises from death, conquering Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God. Furthermore, not only does Jesus take all my sin, he gives me all of his righteousness. What the religious people want is what Jesus alone gives: righteousness.

Some of you say, "That's my problem with Christianity, it's too easy. You just receive this free gift of grace and righteousness." No, it's the hardest thing in the world because it requires humility. To say, "I don't contribute to my salvation. I don't participate in my salvation." It's not Jesus works and I work and together we get the job done. It's all of Jesus, none of me, and I humbly receive a gift of grace. Is there hope for the religious? Yes. What the religious really want is what Jesus alone truly gives, forgiveness of sin and righteousness.

So let me summarize with this. It's not about me, it's about Jesus. It's not about my performance, it's about his perfection. It's ultimately not about my religion, it's about his redemption. It's not about what I do for God, it's about what God does for me out of love. And it's not a work I achieve, it's a gift I receive. Amen.

Father God, I pray for my friends. I pray that you would keep us from that default mode of the human heart toward religion. God, we want to serve zealously and passionately and fervently, but we want to do it like Paul. Not so that you'll love us, but because you do. Not so that we could be righteous, but because in Christ we are. Not so that you would find us holy, but because Jesus is our holiness, Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus, thank you so much that you deliver us not only from Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God, but religion as well. Rule-keeping, nitpicking, fight-making. Jesus, thank you for saving us from religion. Please keep saving us from religion that leads to pride, where we feel like we're better than everyone else. Or despair, we fell miserably short. Please give us the Holy Spirit, the resurrection power. Please give us new life that we would be as passionate as Paul for the same reasons that he was. God, please give us hope for those who are religious. For those who are religious, God, I pray they'd repent of their religion, that they'd repent of their righteousness, that their religion and their righteousness is their sin. For those who have capitulated to religious people, they've backed up on their convictions, they've caved in under criticism, please allow them to lovingly hold their ground and have the conflict that is needed like Jesus did. And Jesus, thank you for your healing of this man with dropsy. In him, we see our own condition. Sin has made us sick and will cost us our life. And you come to make us all better and to send us on a brand-new life. We receive that and we're super excited about it and we say thank you. Amen.

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Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.

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