

## 10 - QUESTIONING JESUS' AUTHORITY

### Luke 6:1-11

The simple act of reaping a few kernels of ripening grain got Jesus and his disciples. The story may have been important to the church in Luke's time. The Pharisees had assumed the religious and political leadership of the Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire during the years after the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 CE. Keeping of the sabbath by attendance at synagogue services had become of supreme importance.

Jesus turned the challenge on its head. It was undoubtedly still a very painful issue for devout Jews, and especially those who were Pharisees, that they could not longer go up their sacred sanctuary to offer the traditional sacrifices that had become so much a part of their worship. Jesus seems almost to have taunted them by pointing to an incident in the life of their greatest king, David (1 Samuel 21:1-6).

As Sharon Ringe points out in her *Luke* in the *Westminster Bible Companion* series, three anomalies in the story. What the disciples did was within law of Moses because the reaped grain met an immediate need, always permissible on the sabbath. The Pharisees were walking with Jesus, something forbidden on the sabbath. That the story about David did not exactly fit the situation may indicate that it may have been a literary creation by Luke to make his point to prove that Jesus' authority surpassed that even of David.

The principle of Jesus' authority for Christians is fully expressed in the words of 6:5. The issue is not what one does on the sabbath, but what rules one's life all of the time.

The second incident similarly established Jesus' authority over all of life, not just the sabbath. Synagogue attendance involved studying the Torah and other Hebrew scriptures. All Jewish men were required to be there, even the disabled if at all possible.

Although healing was considered work, it was permissible as long as it dealt with a life-threatening situation. In a world where right-handedness was dominant, this would not have fitted the case. To wait until the sabbath was over at sunset would not have endangered the man's life.

Again the story may point to a distinct separation of synagogue and church in Luke's community. For Christians, the issue is about the purpose of keeping the sabbath, not about the letter of the law. Jesus' concern was for the disabled man. To heal his disability was closer to the purpose of the commandment in rigid but vapid holiness: to serve God wholly in body, mind and spirit. As has been noted before, in English *healing*, *health*, *whole* and *holy* all come from the same ancient German root word *heil*.

Have we lost the meaning of keeping the sabbath? It has been said that today on any given Sunday, there are more Christians at worship than at all the professional sports events in the country. But what about the rest of the week? It too is holy.

