

Part 17: The Privileges of Following Jesus

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One of the privileges I have in ministry is being the chaplain of the Grizzly Football team. One year the football office offered me a sideline pass to a game. I'm a huge football fan, and there is nothing more exciting to me than having the opportunity to watch a game from the sidelines. So I was very excited. But I'm also by nature an anxious, rule-keeping worrier.

I realized that I wouldn't know where to go with my pass. I didn't know what I wasn't allowed to do with my pass, and I'm also the kind of person that assumed that no one would believe me that I was allowed to be there and they would run a counterfeit test on my field pass.

But there was a football player who I was discipling at the time and I just asked him if he would walk me in and show me where I needed to go. In my anxiety I had rehearsed a thousand times how I would walk into the stadium, trying to look confident, but not too confident, wearing my pass in such a way where it was visible, but also trying to make it look like I was supposed to be there. But when the day finally came, I walked in with my friend and no one checked my pass. No one called out my credentials, no one put up a fuss at all. Why? Because I was with someone who by nature belonged there.

Things were immediately different for me because of who I walked with.

In the gospel of Luke we have been getting a glimpse into what it looks like to be called to follow Jesus. What we are going to see today in our passage is that for those who follow Jesus, our life at his side looks different. When we follow Jesus we will encounter all sorts of new trials and new challenges. But what our passage shows us today is for those who stay side by side with Jesus we walk in a new privileges as well.

Being with Jesus doesn't mean all of life's problems are solved immediately, but it does mean that we are with the one who brings us new perspective and new hope. We are going to examine three distinct privileges of walking with Jesus in this passage and our main idea is this: **Following Jesus brings new celebration, new provision, and new restoration.**

For those of you who are here today wondering what it looks like to follow Jesus, I hope what you see is the surpassing goodness of that relationship. For those of you in here who do walk with Jesus I want you to consider how you might better understand and take advantage of these privileges as you continue on the road of discipleship.

Last week Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees because he didn't look or act like who they expected. If we don't see our sin as our greatest problem, Jesus and his gospel will always seem foreign to us. Our passage today picks up right after Jesus was criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. But as Luke continues he shows us that it wasn't only Jesus who failed the expectations of the religious elite, but his disciples also didn't meet expectations.

Notice the opening critique of the Pharisees today: **Luke 5:33.**

Here the Pharisees notice something that I hope would be true of your own life today—that the disciples of Jesus look different than other people.

The point of conflict was how the disciples acted. The disciples of the Pharisees, those who sat under the teaching of the Law, the disciples of John, those who sat under the anticipation of God's coming messiah, all fasted and prayed. But the disciples of Jesus are doing just the opposite—eating and drinking.

Now is there anything wrong with praying and fasting? No! Is there anything wrong with eating and drinking? No! As long as we aren't being gluttonous drunkards (which we never see to be the case with Jesus or his followers). So instead what we see is an important principle which is this: our proximity and relationship to Jesus changes what we do and why we do it.

When Jesus is present, whether for the first time in his incarnation, or even for the long haul in our salvation, it effects what we do and why we do it. This is the first privilege of walking with Jesus: **New Celebration**.

Consider Jesus' to the Pharisees: **Luke 5:34-35**.

Jesus' first response here is to identify himself with a bridegroom. In the culture of the day in preparation for a wedding you would fast. This was two-fold. First it would be to prepare your heart for the sobriety and joyful gravity of a marriage covenant. But second it would prepare your belly for the feast that you would have after the ceremony.

Today, you might go to a wedding and finish the ceremony and then the one leading it says, "Please make your way to the reception hall, where you are free to socialize with one another until the bridal party arrives." We all know what that means. It means stand together, smell the delicious food, but don't eat any of it.

But then that wonderful moment comes when the bride and groom return to the banquet hall and what do we do? We celebrate and we eat. Why? Because it is fitting. Jesus says it is fitting for the wedding guests to not eat when the groom is away, but when the groom returns, it's no longer time for waiting, it's time for rejoicing.

This allegory might be simple for us today, but for the Pharisees it would have been absolutely scandalous. For Jesus to identify with a bridegroom would have been an obvious statement that Jesus was *the* bridegroom.

In the Old Testament, God had always spoken of his people as his bride. But God's relationship to his people had been anything but celebration as of late. Israel had sinned and chased after other idols, other lovers, other stand-in husbands. Sin leads us away from our true love and into the arms of superficial lovers. God spoke of this rebellion as adultery and the result was that God would discipline his people.

Look at how Jeremiah describes this judgement in **Jeremiah 16:8-9**.

He would discipline his people by withdrawing from them, so that they might realize all the false husbands they ran off to were unable to love them like God was able to. He would shut down the celebration.

This is what happened. Israel, just like our hearts do, ran as far away from God as they could. They looked under every rock and every hill to try and find the love that they left and by the end of it they found nothing but the frantic pace of anxious worship.

Perhaps you've been there. Perhaps you've run to every relationship, to every job, to every social club hoping that they would love you as you feel you ought to be loved. But even when you find that love you're faced with two crippling emotions. At our best we have a constant fear of losing that love. Or at worse we find ourselves after a season of joy to be unloved once more. This is why the gospel is exclusively our good news. In the cross of Jesus it gives us confidence of God's love for us in the work of Jesus and it reminds us that for those who stand in Jesus his love always remains for us.

We know this because the same God that silenced the wedding feast, was the same God who promised to restore. Look at **Jeremiah 33:10-11**. God at some point was going to bring the groom back. At some point the waiting, the lamenting, would leave as people saw and returned to the groom.

Isaiah described this return with this beautiful language: **Isaiah 62:1-5**. Though our sins silenced the party, God would not stay silent. Though our rebellious hearts ran aloof, God would run forward in faithfulness. Though Israel abandoned their vows they would be wed again and the result would be rejoicing.

This is who Jesus is claiming to be in this passage. He was claiming to be the restoration of all the joy lost by the effects of sin. Jesus was the faithfulness of God returning in the flesh to redeem his bride. Here was the cause for celebration for the Bridegroom had come.

If we are honest, do we view following Jesus as less of a marriage and more of a mortgage? When you buy a house you give up something. You give up a lot of money in hopes that one day, after you continue to pay it off, it can become exclusively yours again. How many of us come to Jesus because we realize it's better than homelessness, but in the meantime all we do is pay down debt in hopes it one day gets better? But coming to Jesus is not a mortgage, it's a marriage. It's a giving away of a life of singleness. We do in a sense give up liberty, but it's the kind of liberty that is willingly swallowed up by the joy of marriage. It's a liberty which finds its life in its new communion with the beloved.

This new celebration comes because in Jesus we have an entirely new life. Jesus himself makes this clear in his following parable: **Luke 5:36-39**.

Jesus here uses two allegories which might be a bit foreign to us in our day but they are meant to express surpassing goodness of the new. You can mend an old pair of jeans by going to the store, buying a new pair, cutting off a fresh portion and patching it onto the old. But wouldn't it be better to just put on the new pair of jeans?

The Pharisees and the disciples of John were having a hard time reconciling how Jesus would fit into the old paradigm of the law. But Jesus is here telling them that he's not here to fit into the law, but to fulfill it. He's something new.

This is why he ends the parables with the one drank the old wine and said: "This is good enough for me!" But in that day new wine was always better, stronger and more flavorful than the old. It would only be the arrogant fool who would be content with the old and leave the new untouched.

This is a great application for us today as it shows us the privilege of coming to Jesus. Jesus is better than the life you've had. You might be one who feels like you can take Jesus and sort of patch up the broken places in your life, or insert his newness into the shell of the life you've grown old with. The newness of Jesus consumes the whole of your life, but it's for the better. It's actually for your joy!

Even for us who live in the days when the bridegroom has been taken from us, ascended to the right hand of God the Father, this is still the better life. We are not without the comfort of the bridegroom for he has given us the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, God himself to dwell in us reminding us that one day he will come back.

Like any long-distance relationship, there are seasons of joy but there are also seasons of homesickness and seeming loss. In fact we know that even for Jesus' disciples, this celebration wasn't always feasting, yet even in their want they were met by Jesus' perfect provision. This is what we see in our next portion today: **New Provision**.

Read with me **Luke 6:1-2**.

So here we see Jesus' disciples following him, and they were hungry. What Jesus brought them into didn't look like a banquet hall, but even as they walked with Jesus, they walked right where they were able to get just enough to keep going.

What was that "just enough?" it was grabbing some heads of grain from a field, rubbing them together in their hands, and eating the grain. This wasn't theft. The Old Testament law actually made a provision for travelers to grab roadside snacks like this.

But just as we saw before, the Pharisees took note of how Jesus' followers were acting. Luke doesn't tell us that Jesus ate this way, but instead that his disciples did and in response to that the Pharisees began to attack them for breaking the law of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week. In the law God gave rules regarding the Sabbath. It was based off God's creation week. God worked for six days, but on the seventh day, God rested. So too was this Sabbath a day of rest, it was set apart and distinct.

How were God's people to keep the Sabbath distinct? There were three explicit commands in the law: don't work, don't kindle a fire (Ex. 35), and don't carry a burden (Jer. 17:22) on the Sabbath.

That's it. Don't work, don't start a fire, don't carry a burden.

Can you imagine if your boss came to you and said: "Here's the deal, I want you to go home and tomorrow I don't want you to do anything, or think anything related to your job. Don't send that email, don't worry about that meeting. In fact don't do anything burdensome at all. All that work will be there when you get back, and I'll take care of everything until then"?

Most of us would probably rejoice at the kindness and generosity of our employer! But at some point these laws meant to relieve burdens became burdensome. This is what our legalistic hearts do all the time isn't it? We take good things given by grace and we make them into grueling things driven by work.

Over the centuries the Jews took those three exclusive laws and they added over a thousand laws to them to make sure that people didn't break them.

Listen to some of these: you couldn't braid hair because that was considered "weaving," and weaving was laborious. You couldn't bathe outside because it could also be construed as watering your grass which would be farming. There's even a debate inside many Jewish communities today if you could turn on a light switch because that is just the modern way of "kindling a fire."

These kind of artificial rules to the nth degree are what the Pharisees attacked the disciples for. It should be noted that the disciples weren't breaking the law. But they were accused of it because as they plucked the grain they were guilty of "harvesting," and when they rolled the husk off they were guilty of "threshing."

But this is why Jesus' response is so fantastic. Jesus, speaks up in defense of his disciples. Isn't that amazing? The devil will tell you lies all the time, trying to convince you that you are failing, trying to remind you of your sin. But for those who walk with Jesus, Jesus speaks in our defense. And look at what he says: **Luke 6:3-5**.

Jesus drops a bombshell on the Pharisees here by claiming that he, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath.

Why does he do this? He does this to show who he is, and what the Sabbath is ultimately about. He is the Lord, and the Sabbath has always been about God's provision not man's contribution.

Jesus shared a story from 1 Samuel 21 where King David and his followers are on the run from Saul who is trying to kill him. David runs to the priest at Nob, and asks the priest if he has any food. The only food the priest had was the bread of the presence. That bread was a special bread. They bake the bread and set it before the presence of God in the temple, and each week the priest would enter the temple, replace the old bread with new bread and the priests would eat the old bread as part of God's provision of their meal.

But the priest offered that restricted bread to David, who was not a priest, and David shared it with his men who were hungry, and the Lord did not reprimand David for this.

Jesus' point here is this: "If David was able to provide for his men, than as Lord of the Sabbath, as the creator God who established the day of rest in the first place, am I not also able to provide for my own men?"

When Jesus says he was Lord of the Sabbath he was at one time proving his authority over the whole of creation, but he was also proving that he was the rest which the Sabbath was meant to point to.

The Sabbath was put in place so that God's people would always look back at God's provision to his people, to those who were with him. Look at **Deuteronomy 5:14-15**.

When Moses first gave the law in Exodus 20 the first commandment wasn't "don't work." Instead it was, "Remember." Remember how God always cares for his people. Remember you had nothing and God still provided for you.

In fact the first time the word "Sabbath" shows up in scripture is in Exodus 16 where the people of God are grumbling against God after God brought them out of Egypt and before he gave them the law. The people were frustrated because they thought God saved them only to let them starve.

How many of us view walking with Jesus the same way? Is our default to view obedience as God's kind provision to us? Or an obstacle which we need to overcome in order to get what we really want?

But God said he was going to send bread from heaven, manna. And you were to gather just enough for that day, if you gathered more and tried to keep it for the next day, it would rot. Why? Because people wouldn't be trusting God's provision of manna in the morning. But on the sixth day God actually commanded his people to gather twice as much as they needed and look at what was said: **Exodus 16:23-27**.

The Sabbath existed to cause anxious and overworked people to look up and remember that in God's covenantal love, they are cared for. The reason the law was given, the reason the Sabbath rules existed, was so that God might dwell in the midst of men. But here God was in the midst of men and in this relationship there was provision. The Pharisees made it about the work they could do to abstain enough from the world that they might be pure, but here we see that the Sabbath isn't about what we lack, but about the provision of Jesus in the flesh. The presence of God has come to us in Jesus Christ and we are provided for perfectly in the midst of it.

Now it's true that Jesus fulfills the law. We are no longer bound to the law of the Sabbath, but there is a way in which all of us are bound to the reality of the Sabbath. It is woven into our world and our week that one day ought to be a holy day, a day of remembering God's favor.

So what might that look like? For some of us that might look like realizing we can step away from our work week for a day and God will still provide for us. He has intentionally limited us so that we might realize he is the true and only provider. For many of us it might look like having one day a week where we step away from the other passions in life so that we might remind ourselves of the unique privilege that comes in walking with Jesus. Our rest and our joy is meant to be unique and we should weave into our lives ways in which that provision is clear to us and to those around us.

This might seem like more legalism, but let this final story show that there is nothing better than finding our provision in Jesus. Here we see our final point this morning: **New Restoration**.

Read with me **Luke 6:6-11**.

So here we see another Sabbath conflict. Jesus is in a synagogue teaching and the Pharisees see a man with a withered hand.

Notice the contrast between the leaders of the world and the savior of the world. The leaders of the world see a man who is wounded and they encounter only a point to be made. But Jesus sees the man not as a talking point, but as one who needed healing.

And here we see the nature of Jesus' Sabbath rest—it's far better than any rest we could ever dream of. The best labors of the world try to make you feel like you're resting in a world which is still so broken. But Jesus' rest, true rest, will not come by ignoring what is broken, but by healing it.

The Pharisees understanding of Sabbath rest was so distorted that there was no room even for mercy, but Jesus here shows that for the Lord of the Sabbath, his rest is a total restoration of what is broken. It's not a breaking of the Sabbath to heal, but instead it's the purpose of the Sabbath to heal.

This cycle of Sabbath was so foundational that God actually broke up years into a Sabbath. Every seventh year the Israelites were told to not even farm the land. The sixth year they gathered more, and the land itself was to rest. How would you do with that? Don't we see once more the problem of our heart where each of us want nothing more than to rest, and yet rest seems to be the most fearful thing of all.

What if I told you to not work for a whole year and to trust that there will be provision for you the next year? We would all doubt that, we would find ways to side gig, secure our income, and get our food. But look at how God spoke of this Sabbath year: **Leviticus 25:3-5**.

God's rest is so profound, his care for his creation so intimate that he cares for the status of the field. The field gets a rest.

When God sent Israel into captivity he described that exile as a Sabbath rest for the land. He said that while Israel was gone the land would enjoy its Sabbath rest and it wasn't until that land was joyfully restored that Israel would get to come back.

Brothers and sisters if the Lord of the Sabbath, the presence of God himself, is so profound that it restores land how much more does the Sabbath exist to restore hands. This is what Jesus did. He called this man up so as to not mistake the intention of Jesus' redemption and he said: "Stretch out your hand."

Now what would the reasonable response of the man be? "I can't!" That's been the whole of his life! A withered hand cannot stretch, that's what makes it withered.

But here, on this Sabbath, when the Lord of it spoke, this man attempted the impossible and he was restored.

The stunning contrast we see in this text is that by the end the Pharisees are the ones breaking the law by doing evil and planning murder in their hearts, but Jesus' restoration is not a violation of the Sabbath but the purpose of it.

To come to Jesus in faith is to stretch out your withered soul to be restored by the one who makes all things new. You see Jesus is something new in this text. He's new in the same way we find new archeological discoveries, he's new because he's a rediscovery of something that was long lost.

What we see in this text is a glimpse back into the garden—a restoration of what man had lost and sin had distorted. Here God was present with his people. This is what you were made for. In the midst of this presence was celebration, provision and restoration. If this is the benefit of walking with Jesus, how might your life be different when you draw near to him in faith?