

Disruptive Hope

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[0 : 00] This is from the biography of Jesus, written by Luke, Luke's Gospel, found in the New Testament part of the Bible, chapter 5, verse 33 to chapter 6 and verse 11.

They said to him, John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.

Jesus answered, Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them. In those days they will fast.

He told them this parable. No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No. New wine must be poured into new wineskins.

[1 : 11] And no one, after drinking old wine, wants the new, for he says, the old is better. One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the cornfields, and his disciples began to pick some ears of corn, rub them in their hands, and eat the grain.

Some of the Pharisees asked, Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath? Jesus answered them, Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.

Then Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. So they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

[2 : 24] But Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said to the man with the shriveled hand, Get up and stand in front of everyone. So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath?

To do good or to do evil? To save life or to destroy it? He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, Stretch out your hand.

He did so, and his hand was completely restored. But they were furious, and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Thanks, Fergus. So this is a passage we're looking at together today in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 5, running into chapter 6. There are three different incidents that Fergus read to us there.

One around fasting, and two around the Sabbath day. And Luke is being unfolding for us a portrait of who Jesus is.

[3 : 35] And at the heart of that portrait is his mission, his call to love and to care for those in need, to call sinners to repentance.

And we see the great heart and compassion of Christ as he goes about this mission. But now we have three incidents that are kind of designed by Luke to show the reaction that the love, the goodness, and the teaching of Jesus brings.

And that reaction here is a reaction that is full of conflict and dissonance. And so we see that as the love and the hope of Jesus enters into the world around him, that it disrupts many people's lives.

And the way that they deal with that disruption is to push back against Jesus. So that at the end of the reading there in verse 11, Fergus read this.

He said, they were furious. Now, that means they were totally mad with Jesus. They were possessed with anger. And they began to discuss with each other what they might do to Jesus.

[4 : 48] So there's a new dark cloud entering this picture. There's a note, a somber note coming into the gospel of Luke now. It's been there all along and it's getting louder and louder.

And it's this, that there will be violent and in the end deadly opposition to Jesus and the hope that he brings. It's always a challenge, isn't it?

How do we relate to the world around us? For those of us who are Christians, how do we relate to the world around us? When we feel that we're out of step with its beliefs and with a lot of the ideas that are prevalent in our culture.

And what we see Jesus do is this. We see that he affirms what is good in the world around him. He helps where things are hard. And then he's willing to challenge what is bad.

And that's really what's going on here. He's challenging patterns of behavior, patterns of religion, patterns of thought that aren't healthy.

[5 : 53] He's demonstrated so much of his love and goodness. He's brought help to people who are in the hardest of circumstances. And now he disrupts the actions and the beliefs of those who are living in opposition to God.

So as you go through the week, if you want to remember what we've been talking about, our Thursday thought or our Friday flashback. Jesus and his followers will affirm what is good, help where things are hard and challenge what is bad.

So three simple things that can guide us as Christians as we connect to the world around us. We affirm what is good. We help where things are hard and we challenge what is bad.

So I want to think for a little while about the opposition here to Jesus, this rising sense of resistance to the work of Jesus Christ in this world.

And the thing about the opposition to Jesus is it doesn't look like the opposition to Jesus. Because and they certainly don't think that they're the bad guys in the story.

[7 : 02] They think they're the good guys. They're the Pharisees and the scribes, the teachers of the law. I don't know if you remember the storming of the Capitol building recently in Washington, D.C.

And all these various sort of pressure groups or splinter groups, the Proud Boys or QAnon. And the Pharisees were not an official organization.

They were a pressure group and they were a super conservative pressure group pushing for religious reform. They would not have been big Trump fans.

I'm not saying that. But they were people who wanted to bring back the most scrupulous conservative interpretations of Judaism.

They weren't a large group, but they had a lot of influence. And people on the fringes of the Pharisees were willing to use violence to achieve their goals. And this zeal, this passion for devout interpretations of the laws of Israel and devout enforcement of the laws of Israel was always the idea that if they obeyed hard enough, then the kingdom of God would come again.

[8 : 15] God's been absent for Israel for 400 years. He seems to have forgotten and abandoned them. How do they regain God's favor by scrupulous attention to his law?

And so they're all caught up with their campaign, with their pressure group, with their work to restore the laws of Israel. And they're so busy with all of that.

Do you know what? They forget about God. They've lost sight of where God is in the picture and what God is up to. They're religious, but they're blind.

They've got the framework of religious rules. They've got the scriptures of the Old Testament, but they absolutely lack the reality of God.

And that's a kind of scary truth for you if you're a religious person, isn't it? That you can be a very devout person, very religious, very moral, and yet have no connection to God at all.

[9 : 18] And the reason that happens, of course, is because if you're a really devout religious, moral person, then you start to believe that it's this that will win God's approval and favor.

That's the way the Pharisees thought about it. They don't really have any sense of their own inadequacies, their own fallenness and brokenness. They can't see how much they need God, his rescue, and his forgiveness.

In fact, religion often becomes a safe place to hide from the reality of God and reality of our own sinful lives. If I do the right things on the outside, if my behavior looks all good, then it doesn't matter about my loveless, bitter, angry heart.

And when we see how the Pharisees treat the man with the withered hand, we know that despite the religious facade, there's a lack of love. When we see how they begin to react and plot against Jesus, we see there is a lack of love.

There's no room in these angry hearts for God or for his grace. They keep adding rules around fasting because we read here, why aren't your disciples fasting all the time like our disciples?

[10:37] And there was only one fast required in the Old Testament law for the Day of Atonement. But they want lots of fasts to show how really good they are.

Or, you know, the Sabbath, important in Judaism, central to their identity as Jews. But they just kept adding more and more laws about what it looked like to observe the Sabbath.

And so all these rules become the way of winning the favor of God. There's no sense that we depend on God for our salvation.

No sense that we depend on the promises of God, the grace of God. We don't win God's favor. We don't earn God's favor. God's favor is given to us despite the fact we don't win it or earn it or deserve it.

That's what grace is all about. Undeserved favor and kindness. And so they become much more obsessed with doing things right than doing the right things.

[11:41] They lose sight of what it looks like to really live out the laws of God, which are about loving God and loving our neighbor. However, what does a real relationship with God look like?

There's a verse in Luke or a few verses in Luke in chapter 18 that I want to read to you, because I think they're really central to understanding the message of this gospel. So Luke chapter 18 at verse 9, there's a story I'm going to read to you.

Two guys who go up to the temple to pray. One's a Pharisee like this group and the other's a tax collector like Levi, who appears in the earlier verses.

Very much a look down on and despise kind of character. And Jesus tells this story to whom? To people who are confident of their own righteousness. And look down on everyone else.

So he says, But the tax collector stood at a distance.

[12:57] He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. I tell you that this man rather than the other went home justified before God.

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted. The gospel humbles us. It shows us that we are sinners, that we do go wrong, that we fail to love God and neighbor as we should, that we don't come to God with a proud array of righteous acts to say to God, look how good I am.

We've got nothing like that to offer. The gospel humbles us and shows us our inadequacies. But it also shows us how great a savior Jesus is with his wonderful, merciful, melting heart of compassion for us.

And whoever you are today, however you've looked at your life up until now, Jesus cares about you. He loves you. He cares about your circumstances. He cares about your suffering.

And he cares about what's wrong in your life. And he says, Come. Come. And I'll make things right for you. Let me do the work.

[14:15] Let me be the savior in this story. It doesn't have to be you. In fact, it can't be you. So the opposition doesn't look like the opposition. You know, you look at and you think, look at these lovely religious young men, so zealous, so devout, so moral, and so far from God.

So Jesus comes along, and he, with the hope that he offers through his love and goodness, he disrupts the lives of these men and of their way of thinking.

So we're going to look at disruption. We've looked at opposition. We're also going to look at disruption. I heard a quote this week, You cannot change what you do not love. So I thought that was a good quote from a friend this week.

So you cannot change what you do not love. And Jesus wanted to disrupt the world around him, and we want to disrupt the world as much as we can because of love, because we love the world we live in, we love the people around us, and we want to bring the disruptive influence of the hope of the gospel to them.

That's our calling, isn't it? To live lives that don't just fit the existing paradigms, but that bring something new, charged with hope and goodness.

[15:34] I read a book a number of years ago by Malcolm Gladwell, David and Goliath it was called, Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants.

Well, I'm a misfit. Christians are misfits. We're certainly underdogs, and we feel often like we're battling giants. And the book was about David and Goliath, the little guy against the massive guy, the giant, his little sling in its stone, Goliath's massive spear and shield, you know, and it just seems like a mismatch.

But, you know, asymmetrical power, the small guy overcomes the great guy because he's smarter, he's more efficient. So Gladwell goes down that route with it all.

But there is a power in the hope of the gospel that is unimaginable. There is a power in it, despite the smallness of God's people in many ways and the fragility of the church.

There's a power in this hope that can turn the world on its head. Little churches, little people, little old be, little old you, we can actually bring great things when we learn from Jesus and his disruptive hope.

[17:01] What does this disruption look like? Chaos? Aggression? I used to love disrupting stuff. I've told you this before, when I was a student. Top of Leith Walk, there's a roundabout, really busy, just outside the playhouse and everything like that.

Blocking the traffic there with hundreds of other annoying students to protest the poll tax. Stopping the traffic all across central Edinburgh. Really annoying the commuters and the Tories.

Very successful day out. Or in London, marching with half a million people, disrupting central London, London, why? Because apartheid needed to stop.

So, you know, sometimes we think of that, that being disruptive means being really difficult and making things hard for other people.

But that's not what this is about, is it? Because the disruptiveness, disruptiveness of Jesus is about celebration and truth and the source of truth and about love.

[18:09] So, that's kind of three things I want to say about how Jesus goes about disrupting the world around them. Celebration, truth, and love. So, Jesus is putting celebration back on the table, isn't he?

Because the Pharisees, that's one of the reasons the Pharisees aren't very happy. He's just been at a great feast at Levi's house. Marvellous time with all kinds of people showing up.

and they've had the most incredible meal together, warm sense of friendship and joy and camaraderie, the kind of thing that we're all really looking forward to post-lockdown.

And, they come to him, the Pharisees and the scribes and they say, you know, John's disciples fast and pray our disciples fast but you just go on eating and drinking.

And what does Jesus say? Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he's with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them. In those days they will fast. So, Jesus is saying, I'm here, I'm the bridegroom.

[19:12] I'm everything you've been waiting for. I'm God coming in the flesh bringing the kingdom that you've all been expecting for.

You've mourned a long time because you felt God is absent from Israel. But now God has come among you again and so there is rejoicing in my disciples.

There will be a time when they don't rejoice anymore, when I'm gone from them, the time of crucifixion, the time of Christ's death. But, overall, when Christ is present with his people, there is rejoicing.

The joy of the believer, as we know, doesn't depend on their circumstances, on how well life is going for them. the joy of the Christian rests on Christ himself, on his presence, his nearness.

Somebody shared a verse with me this week from Proverbs chapter 15, verse 15. The cheerful heart has a continual feast and that's so much of what Jesus brings to his people.

[20:19] Why? Because he shows us that his grace is here. It's alive and active. He is healing. He is teaching. He is bringing the new world and he's inviting us to enjoy the fruits of God's kingdom.

The kingdom isn't created through the devotion of the Pharisees, but by the power of Jesus Christ, his works, his words, his sacrifice, his actions.

There is so much to rejoice in when Jesus draws near. And so he says to them, you know, these three little stories, you've got a new garment, okay, and you've got an old garment, the old garment's got a hole in it.

Well, you're not going to cut a bit out of the old garment, the new garment, and stick it in the old one. Doesn't make much sense. You ruin the new one and then when you wash the old one, the new cloth will shrink in its first wash and tear the old garment again.

You don't gain anything. Or, they made wineskins from the neck of a goat and its stomach. And it would stretch, but once it was old, it would lose its sort of elasticity.

[21 : 33] And when you put new wine in, it would keep fermenting and burst the old skin. Or if you've got a delicious bottle of wine, the older wine, mature and good, you're not going to say, give me the rubbish wine.

You're going to want the good wine, not the poor wine. And so, Jesus is saying, I'm doing something good. I'm bringing something good. I'm bringing something new. And it's utterly new. It's powerful and it's radical. He's not just here to patch up Judaism or pour some new energy, some new life into it.

He is doing something radically new. He's shifting the whole emphasis away from the Old Testament with its systems and sacrifices and rituals.

And he's moving the focus from that onto himself. Because all the Old Testament, of course, its sacrifices and rituals was pointing towards Jesus. And now he's saying, I've come.

[22 : 38] All these things are going to fall away. The new wine of the kingdom of Jesus is here. Jesus doesn't just come to me or to you to patch up our lives a little bit or to pour in a little bit of something new.

What God is going to do when he saves you is so utterly radical that you become a new creation, a new person through him. Because you're not just getting a new set of rules to live by.

You're not just getting a bit of zeal to obey the old rules better. you are inheriting the amazing weight of God's grace.

The tidal wave of his love. A depth of love that is so deep. Somebody sent me a text yesterday from Robert Murray McShane who was a preacher 200 years ago in Dundee.

He said this, the love of Christ goes to such unfathomable depths. Believer, dive and dive again and you will never reach the bottom.

[23 : 50] And that's what God is offering to us. Not just a little bit of self-improvement, not a little bit of trying harder, not a little bit of being gooder. He is offering incredible unfathomable love to transform your life.

So that's what's so disruptive about Jesus. He loves his disciples. He brings them joy. He loves the man with the withered hand.

He heals him immediately. He doesn't say let's wait for another day when it's not going to annoy people. It may be the Sabbath and the Sabbath means this man needs healed.

Or when he's walking through the cornfields with his hungry disciples, he wants them to eat. he wants them to be nourished and to be fed and not to have to wait. And so the same heart of kindness, love, consideration and concern is there.

And Jesus wants to help you now. Just like the man with the withered hand, now, this moment. If you call out to Jesus, he will help you. And, you know, he comes with such authority.

[24 : 58] That's part of what the Pharisees struggle with. You know, who do you think you are? Why are you doing, they say in verse 2 of chapter 6, why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?

In verse 7, they're looking for reasons to accuse Jesus. They watch him closely to see if he's going to heal on the Sabbath. And he does.

Their skepticism, their cynicism, their hostility isn't going to stop him from doing good. And every culture has its own sources of authority.

You know, in ours it's David Attenborough or Richard Dawkins or Obama or the AOC or whoever it is. In first century Judaism, then great authority came from the traditions and from the scribes and the scholars who interpreted those traditions.

They were guides to right and wrong and truth. They told you how to live according to the law, how to observe the Sabbath, how to fast, how to treat sick people, what to do with your money, what to do with your time.

[26 : 08] And so when Jesus comes along and ignores them, they're like, show us your CV. Who do you think you are? What are your credentials? Who does this guy think he is?

And that is what Luke is trying to help us uncover. Who does Jesus think he is? Well, verse 5 he tells us, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Son of Man, 25 times that phrase appears in the book of Luke. You can find its origins in Daniel chapter 7 in the Old Testament. The Son of Man is a figure of ultimate authority, empowered and

endorsed by the eternal God, the Ancient of Days.

The Son of Man is a figure of great divinely ordained authority and guess what? He says to these freaking out Pharisees, he's the Lord of the Sabbath.

Now, who gave the Sabbath? God gave the Sabbath. So, to be Lord of the Sabbath, that is an extraordinary claim of authority. He equates himself with David, the greatest king of Israel.

[27 : 22] Haven't you ever read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? They didn't let the rules stop them from eating what they needed because the need was more important. And Luke is showing us that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, he's the Son of Man, and he is the new, the greater David.

He's the ultimate king of Israel. He has such authority and that means that that authority guides how we live our lives.

And because we live by the authority of Jesus in the day-to-day of our lives, that can be disruptive. And then there is love. There's the disruptive power of love, isn't there?

The heart of God being unveiled in the person of Jesus Christ. The law doesn't deny our humanity or compassion. The Sabbath is a day of rest to reorientate our lives to God and to others.

It's a day when we say, I'm going to rest from trying to save myself and the world around me. It's a reminder that we can't do that, that we rest in the work of Christ. And so the Sabbath is a great day to rest.

[28 : 38] We observe the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day, along with many others across the church, because we believe it's given to us by God as a day to rest and to be restored in worship, to be refreshed for the work of the week ahead.

And so Jesus in the Sabbath, he sees it's a day to love God and love his fellow man. And so this man needs help. He's got a withered hand. He can't do his work. He can't look after himself properly.

He needs healed. And so Jesus says, stretch out your hand. He does so and he's completely healed. Amazing. Let me say a few things just as we wrap up then.

I want to say this. We want to live as Christians lives of joy and celebration. If you're not a Christian, that's what we're inviting you to. Not a life of misery and rule keeping, but a life of celebration because Christ loves us and has borne our sin and the cross.

We're forgiven. We're set free from the power of sin. We're given hope for life and we're given hope for eternity. We rejoice in the Lord always and again we rejoice.

[29 : 46] The joy of the Lord is our strength. So there is a life of joy and celebration. When we're all back together at Cornerstone, we're going to have the best parties and we're inside because we've got more to celebrate.

So we celebrate. Secondly, we live by the authority of Scripture. Jesus is our source of authority for life. Not human tradition, but Christ through his word and through the church over time, helping us how to understand the truth of the gospel.

So we don't live by the same authorities as our culture some of the time. Where the culture speaks with wisdom and insight, we rejoice and we embrace that.

But where the culture speaks against what the Bible teaches, then we hold to that. That's part of being bringing our disruptive hope. I want to say we live by the hope and rest of the Sabbath day. Lolita Jackson is a friend of Louise and I and of many of the people at Cornerstone. And she works for the office of the mayor in New York.

[30 : 58] She works in climate change and very, very sort of busy, important job. but she Sabbaths.

She says to her colleagues she won't be getting hold of me through email or by phone on Sunday, not unless it's an absolute emergency. It's my Sabbath. She rests.

And that ability to rest speaks volumes to a world that's frantically caught up with trying to prove itself and work harder and harder to earn its worth and prove its goodness.

And then we want to love. We love remarkably. We love in extraordinary ways. We love those who will never return anything to us.

We love those who hurt the most. So think about how we love as a church, how you love as an individual, how you love your enemies, how you love those who've grieved you or hurt you, how you love those you fear, how you love those who are around you wounded and weak.

[32 : 09] And what makes this life possible and plausible? Only Jesus. I can't live that kind of life of disruptive hope. I can only live it through the power and the presence of Jesus.

First I need to draw near to him so that I can go out into the world resting in him full of his love, guided by his word and delighting in his goodness.

So who are you in this story? Well, you're probably not the Pharisee, are you? Although there's a little bit of the Pharisee inside of me, I have to say. I'm always finding fault with others and thinking that they should keep the little rules that I think are very important.

Rules of the road or rules of how to load the dishwasher or whatever it might be. So there's a wee bit of the Pharisee in all of us, but you probably don't think of yourself as the Pharisee. you probably don't think of yourself as the opposition, or you probably don't think of yourself as a disruptor either. So you're landing in the middle, just sort of silently head under the parapet, gliding along, not creating any ripples, trying to fit in, not hostile to Jesus, but not really utterly committed to disrupting this world with the hope of Jesus.

[33 : 32] If you're not a Christian, I would invite you into this story and say, it's a better story for you and for this world, the hope that Jesus has brought. And if you are a Christian, then I want to invite you into the disruptive things of the Christian faith.

They're not chaotic, they're not violent, they're not aggressive, they're not harmful, they're good, they're joy, they're rest, they're love and they're truth.

So let's disrupt the world with the hope of Jesus. I'm going to pray, I'm going to sing, and then we're going to hear pastoral prayer, and then sing again.

Father, bring that disruptive power into our lives where we're complacent, where we're far from you, where we're proud, where we're self-reliant, where we worship ourselves rather than worship you, where we follow our own gods rather than follow you, where we're cheerless and miserable, where we're confused and don't understand anymore what truth might be.

Lord, come with your disruptive hope. Where we are weary and crushed, come with your disruptive rest.

[34 : 55] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.