



11. Are you a Jobsworth believer? (Luke 6:1-11)

I don't know if many of you remember *That's Life*. It was a TV programme that ran on Sunday evenings from 1973 to 1994. It was there to show some of the more bizarre sides of life, such as the dog who could say "sausages" as well as dealing with serious issues which led to the development of such charities as Childline. Over the years they also landed the BBC with over £1.2 million in litigation costs! They also had what they called the Jobsworth award which was given each week to the organisation or individual who continued to enforce a rule or policy even though it made no sense, because it was more than their job was worth to do anything else. It gave rise to a word to describe someone - a Jobsworth. In fact the Jobsworth award was inspired by a song by folk singer Jeremy Taylor in the early 1970s.

*Now, I was just an ordinary English man,
Till I got me uniform, and hat,
And ever since that hour, I exercise me power,
Preventing you from doing this and that.
You'll find me on the turnstiles at the zoo,
Or outside the Roxy, marshalling the queue,
And if you turn up late, when I'm on the gate,
It's no good asking me to let you through... 'cause I'll just say:*

*CHORUS: Jobsworth, josbsworth; it's more than my job's worth.
I don't care, rain or snow, whatever you want - the answer's no!
I can keep you standing, for hours in the queue,
And if you don't like, you know what you can do!*

*Fishing in the river, on a summer's day,
I s'pose you think that water's all for free?
But, I've got news for you; everybody pays his due,
And right now it'll cost you 50p.
You may be almost dropping dead from thirst,
Cross legged by the toilet, fit to burst,
But I've got the key ... and you won't get that from me,
Until I've had me little grumble first!*

Chorus

*And when you get back home, you will heave a sigh,
And thank the Lord that you've got rid of me.
But it won't be very long before your telephone goes wrong,
And there's psychedelic colours on TV,
And add to that, your lights have all gone out,
And your central heating boiler's up the spout,
And when you're tearing your hair, and the wife's going spare,
You'll hear us in the distance calling out: (Two, three, four...)*

*CHORUS: Jobsworth, josbsworth; it's more than me job's worth.
I don't care, rain or snow, whatever you want - the answer's no!
I can keep you standing, for ...years in the queue,
And if you don't like, you know what you can do!*

You know what ... you ... can ... do!

So what is a Jobsworth? *A jobsworth is a person who uses their job description in a deliberately obstructive way. (1) The term is most often applied to public service low-level officials, who have little authority, and so the 'jobsworth' response gives them the only power they are likely to get. The true jobsworth is one who knows the rules backwards, knows that there is flexibility and chooses not to use it.*

One of the most common places to find jobsworths is amongst religious folk. Jobsworths are particularly virulent in church situations. Another name we use for them are legalists. They have a rule for every occasion - and they are very religious. When they come to a party, they bring their wet blankets with them. And worse, they bring the name of Christ into ill repute. *A priest once said to Groucho Marx: "Oh, Mr. Marx, I want to thank you for bringing so much joy into the world." Groucho replied rather ungraciously, "I want to thank you for taking so much out."*

How can desiring to keep the law of God actually serve to bring shame to the name of Christ? Because it can and it does. It happens when the observance of rules and regulations becomes more important than the reasons for the rule or regulation being there in the first place.

In Jesus' time, these jobsworths did religion in style because they heard that Jesus didn't do things according to their conventions and rules. His teaching and miracles were being noticed by the religious establishment. In chapter 5 they came to visit Him one Sabbath and saw him heal a lame man after forgiving him his sins - which they knew only God could do. After all if He was healing in the power of God, then He was also forgiving with divine authority. They criticised but they were so jobsworth that they only saw the law - they didn't see God moving.

As we come to Luke 6 it was another sabbath, maybe the next one and these guys are coming to inspect Jesus again. To their horror, they saw His disciples brazenly breaking what they considered Sabbath law. There they were eating grains of corn as they walked by a field. There was nothing wrong with doing that - that was legally permissible in those days. But on the Sabbath!

What was so wrong about having a quick snack? Let me explain. The Pharisees and scribes were very religious. They desired to keep God's law. They knew the commandment: *Exodus 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labour and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.*

But what constituted work? That was a big problem to them. The commandment was a bit vague and they wanted to be precise. So what they did was to put a hedge around it which was a raft or regulations that made sure that no-one accidentally broke the law. It's rather a case of "hedging your bets". So they came up with all sorts of silly rules which guaranteed people did not actually break the Sabbath. Gathering grain and eating it by grinding off the ears with your hand was work by this rule. Really. Well probably not but they couldn't risk God's wrath by getting it wrong - so plucking corn on the Sabbath was verboten as far as they were concerned. What the rabbis had done was turn something that should have been regarded with joy - a rest day and an opportunity for the worship of God - into an object of misery.

Pathetic. Jobsworth stuff. Jews still do it. Richer orthodox Jews have an ordinary kitchen and a kosher kitchen. They do that to ensure that they don't accidentally handle or eat non-kosher food on the Sabbath - so there is no chance that leaven will get mixed with the unleavened. After all they also don't want to end up cooking a goat in it's mother's milk as it stipulates in Exodus and Leviticus (who does that anyway). Why was there that prohibition? Because that's how the Canaanites sacrificed their animals. But centuries later it is hardly an issue.

What was the sabbath there for? To provide rest from work - that's what shabbat is. [There were also sabbath years too.] It was a holy day - a set apart day - a different day. It was also an opportunity to worship God. That's what it says in Exodus, but the Jews had turned it into a farce where the keeping of the law actually detracted from the whole idea of rest as the people were too busy sabbath keeping to recognise God in it - and Jesus hit right at the heart of this issue.

3 Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?"

4 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."

5 Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath"

So you think that eating grain is bad? Then what about God's anointed successor to King Saul. He did something "far worse". He ate the shewbread reserved for the priests in the tabernacle. And no-one ever suggested that was bad. They never referred to David as being sinful because he did that - David was a great king (although not at the time he ate the bread) and circumstances were such that he needed it because he and his men were hungry and had no food.

What point is Jesus making? First of all that the Sabbath is about rest and worship and had absolutely nothing to do with what lunch the disciples had. The law was never made so inflexible that it should defy the common decency of ensuring people are fed. In Mark's Gospel, Mark actually adds the phrase "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:28)*" That's the point. The whole purpose of the Sabbath was to give rest and worship God, but the Pharisees and scribes had made so many Sabbath rules, that the people were serving the sabbath not God - so the point of it was missed.

Jesus slams the double whammy by saying that the Son of Man (Jesus) was Lord of the Sabbath. What is He saying? Just that. He is Lord of the Sabbath. Not that He broke it - he never actually did that. It's just that in creation, He is Lord over it, and therefore Lord over it. We read this in Colossians 1:15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.* Therefore it's up to Him to know what constitutes good Sabbath observance because He's the Lord of it.

Can you imagine what they thought of that? He's LORD of the Sabbath.

Just a minute, the Scribes and Pharisees were the protectors of the Sabbath? Their hedge protected it. No it didn't. They observed the Sabbath but could not see God.

The Lord of the Sabbath pointed out the simple truth; the Sabbath was about putting God in the centre, not human toil and gain. If it's good and right and done on the Sabbath, then what's wrong with it? Nothing.

But there was more to it than that. Luke then recalls another incident where Jesus PROVES His point. He's in the synagogue, on the Sabbath:

7 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.

8 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. 9 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?"

Got 'em! The point was self-evident in the question: *"I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"* It was obvious. How could doing something good and to save life be sinful? And then by the power of God He shows that the God who made the Sabbath, acts on the Sabbath. *10 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. 11 But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. "*

Why were they furious? He had made monkeys of them. He had shown the idiocy of legalism and the fact that if God does good on the Sabbath, then so should everyone else!

And that's what legalism does. The Sabbath was supposed to give people freedom from work so that they were free to use the day to worship God, to do that which is good – and to get some R & R. A day of joy. And they turned it into legalistic misery. The Pharisees had taken God's law, interpreted it to suit them and then presented it back as the legitimate word of God.

How do you view the law of God? I think for most of us we see the whole idea of law in human terms. Law stops you doing something you maybe would like to - particularly if you drive a car. Law is the territory of the Jobsworths. The law is about lawyers, judges, police and courts - and we want to avoid them.

You'll remember at the start of the service I read from Psalm 119. Let's give you another offering: *12 Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes. 13 With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. 14 I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. 16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. 17 Deal bountifully with your servant, so that I may live and observe your word. 18 Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

Here was the psalmist delighting in the law of God. And not just for a few of these verses. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. Longer than some books of the Bible. It is 176 verses long and in each something to do with God's law. Why? Because we've got the wrong view of law. It isn't about restriction, it's about freedom.

This week was Valentine's Day. As with all things modern, it's a money-making racket. But it reminds us that relationships are important. Have you ever had a love letter? They are wonderful things. You hang on every one of your lover's words. You read it over and over. Why? Because she loves you and you love her. The Bible is God's love letter to us and we hang on every word.

The thing about the law of God is that it's rather brief. For example there are only 10 commandments. The sabbath law was rather brief: *8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labour and do all your work. 10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.*

Not much to it eh? Why? It gives it's purpose, it marks boundaries. Because in that day God was giving His people the freedom to rest, to enjoy their food, relax and worship. A day of pleasure from the toils of the week.

But the Jobsworths needed rules and regulations. They needed it defined because it was law and they didn't want to break it. In doing so they missed the point.

And people still miss that point to this day. Remember old-fashioned Sundays. They were days that were a constant round of stuffy services, dressing up smart, having complicated meals and generally not doing anything that may be inferred as being enjoyable. The story is told of one family who removed the swing from their budgies' cage so that it would not enjoy itself.

How awful! Whether or not you consider that the legitimate Sabbath is Saturday or Sunday - a lovely one for the Jobsworths in itself, God always intended that His holy time would be enjoyable - yes enjoyable. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. So make sure you enjoy your special day and most of all, have a good time, both in worship and in resting. Look at the commandment. Where did it say go to meeting after meeting. It's all about rest. But it gives us all a chance of doing something we should truly enjoy - worship!

In fact, the same should be true of every part of our Christian experience. The law was there to show that God's boundaries are pretty generous and there's a lot you don't have to worry about as a Christian. That's why for the most part, it's pretty black and white - because it then means the boundaries are clear.

Where does this take us this morning?

First of all, *we should make sure that the things we do to serve God, don't get in His way.* If I've learned anything over the past few years is that we as "evangelicals" so often live in a world of law - we are a bunch of Jobsworths who believe that we should only do certain things in certain ways. And we do them because we think that our traditions are scriptural. Are they? Have we checked lately? Have we ever checked? For example, have we ever checked if we should treat Sunday as the Sabbath? I nearly did a whole lot on that this morning - but then I realised that God just wants us to enjoy worshipping Him and enjoy time aside not getting crushed by the stress of the world. That's what shabbat is all about, whatever day of the week you think it is. It's more important to have the shabbat - the rest - than observe the day.

Let's break free of being Jobsworths about our buildings, our denomination, our church meetings, the heating, doing things the right way, our traditions, the version of the Bible we read, our pet theological ideas and all the rest of it, that we forget that God has given us the enjoyment of worship, the pleasure of fellowship and the joy of sharing our faith.

Secondly, *we should make sure that the things that we do to serve God don't get in the way of loving others.* The Pharisees so forbade work that they stopped doing good on the sabbath. It was so ridiculous. Yet, isn't it true that believers so desire separation from the world that most of us never get involved in community things, never meet unbelievers and get to know them that we won't ever get to share Christ with too many people. Yet we are called to be salt and light - but people don't get thirsty by our actions: we're just not relevant. But read this: Gal 5: 22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* The law gives us boundaries, but freedom when the Spirit leads us means that we can indulge in all these things without restriction! Great isn't it?

This is our faith! Let's not be "little people", but live in the freedom that God has given us!

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