

Luke 6:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him;

Analysis

And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him. Jesus responds not with defensiveness but with Scripture. **Jesus answering them said** (ἀποκριθεὶς πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, apokritheos pros autous eipen ho Iēsous)—the participle apokritheis (ἀποκριθείς, "answering") indicates a deliberate, authoritative response. Jesus doesn't ignore or deflect but engages directly.

His counter-question is pointed: **Have ye not read so much as this** (οὐδὲ τοῦτο ἀνέγνωτε, oude touto anegnōte). The phrase oude touto (οὐδὲ τοῦτο, "not even this") carries rhetorical force—"Haven't you even read this?" The verb anaginōskō (ἀναγινώσκω) means to read, know, recognize. Jesus rebukes experts in Scripture for missing or ignoring what Scripture actually says. His question is ironic: Pharisees prided themselves on Torah mastery, yet Jesus exposes their ignorance or willful blindness.

Jesus appeals to **what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him** (οἱ ἐποίησεν Δαυίδ, ὅτε ἐπείνασεν αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὄντες, ho epoīesen Dauid, hote epeinasen autos kai hoi met' autou ontes). David's hunger (ἐπείνασεν, epeinasen, from peinaō, πεινάω, to hunger) justified his eating the showbread (1 Samuel 21:1-6). Jesus draws a parallel: as David's need permitted technically irregular action, so do His disciples' hunger. The argument is

a fortiori (from the lesser to the greater)—if David could violate ceremonial law for physical need, how much more can Jesus, the Son of David and Lord of the Sabbath, authorize His disciples' eating? Jesus establishes a principle: human need supersedes ritual regulation when they conflict.

Historical Context

Jesus references 1 Samuel 21:1-6, when David fled Saul and came to the tabernacle at Nob. David asked Ahimelech the priest for food; the only bread available was the showbread (לְחֵם הַפָּנִים, lechem haPanim, "bread of the Presence"). This consecrated bread, twelve loaves representing the twelve tribes, sat on the golden table in the Holy Place (Exodus 25:30, Leviticus 24:5-9). Only priests could eat it, and only after fresh bread replaced it on Sabbath. Yet Ahimelech gave it to David and his men, violating ceremonial law.

Jewish interpreters had long wrestled with this incident. How could David and Ahimelech break Torah without condemnation? The answer: extreme necessity. The principle pikuach nefesh (פיקוח נפש, preservation of life) allowed suspending most commandments to save life. David and his men were starving fugitives; their survival justified the violation. Jesus applies this principle to Sabbath: human welfare supersedes Sabbath restrictions.

Jesus's use of David is also messianic. He is the Son of David (Matthew 1:1), greater than David (Matthew 22:41-46). If David could authorize breaking ceremonial law, how much more can the Messiah? Jesus's Sabbath authority flows from His identity as Lord of the Sabbath (v. 5). The Pharisees missed that they were confronting not a mere rabbi but the Author of the Law Himself. Paul later expounded this principle: 'Love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans 13:10). Law serves love and life; when religious tradition opposes human flourishing, tradition must yield.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus's appeal to David eating the showbread teach about interpreting and applying Scripture?
2. How does the principle that human need can supersede ceremonial law apply to Christian ethics today?
3. What does Jesus's question 'Have ye not read?' reveal about the danger of knowing Scripture intellectually without understanding its heart?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς πρὸς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν οἱ Ἰησοῦς Οὐδὲ

And answering them him said they which Jesus not
G2532 G611 G4314 G846 G2036 G3588 G2424 G3761

τοῦτο ἀνέγνωτε ὃ ἐποίησεν Δαβὶδ, ὅποτε ἐπείνασεν

this Have ye what did David when was an hungry
G5124 G314 G3739 G4160 G1138 G3698 G3983

αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὄντες

him And they which with him were
G846 G2532 G3588 G3326 G846 G5607

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 21:16 (References Jesus): And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

Mark 12:10 (Parallel theme): And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: