

## THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

### Mark 2:23-2:28

Last Sunday we considered the criticism of the Pharisees and the disciples of John surrounding the issue of fasting. Today's lesson involves another criticism, this time surrounding the issue of the Sabbath Day. For many believers this is still an area of dispute. Some churches, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, make Sabbath keeping the major test of spiritual orthodoxy. Other churches consider Sunday to be the Christian Sabbath. And for others Sunday is a day like any other, with no obligation placed upon us. Some see Sunday as just a day to meet with the people of God and worship the Lord through the local church. Unfortunately believers have tended to judge one another on these matters, yet the Bible explicitly cautions us against such judgment.

Writing to the Romans Paul said, **"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it."** (Romans 14:4-6).

And again to the Colossians Paul writes, **"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."** (Colossians 2:16-17).

So as we study this episode in the life of Jesus from Mark 2, there are some questions we should ask ourselves. (1) What is the purpose of the Sabbath? (2) Is the Christian commanded to observe the Sabbath? (3) Is the Lord's Day the Sabbath? (4) What should our attitude be toward the Lord's Day? To help us answer these questions let's look at Mark 2:23-28.

**23 Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain.**

**24 And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"**

**25 But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him:**

**26 how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?"**

**27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.**

**28 Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."**

Now this particular episode we are looking at today graphically demonstrates the truth of the three illustrations that we studied in verses 20 to 22. Here we again

see the stark contrast between dead, legalistic, mournful religious forms, and the living liberty of the joy of the life of grace that is found in our Lord Jesus. Remember how He illustrated the difference? It's like the difference between a funeral and a wedding feast. It's like the difference between an old garment that you try to patch up, and a garment that is completely new. It's the difference between putting new wine in old wineskins that will burst and ruin, and giving new wineskins to hold the new wine.

In verse 23 Jesus and His disciples were walking through a field of grain on the Sabbath. The disciples were hungry and decided to pluck some of the grain. In verse 24 the Pharisees accuse the Lord and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath laws. Jesus gives His answer in verses 25 and 26. Then the Lord gives, in verse 27, an application to that answer, so that we would know how to apply the principle. Then finally, and most greatly, in verse 28 Jesus announces His authority over these things because of who He really is.

### **The Question of the Sabbath: "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"**

The word Sabbath here is a transliteration of the Hebrew word Shabat? It comes from a word that means to cease and desist from labor, or to rest. The number seven in the Hebrew is Sheba, or Shebiym and it may be related to the the word Shabat. So in the Sabbath is the seventh day, a day of rest.

We find it in the Ten Commandments: Exodus 20:8-11 " **"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.."**

Moses states the Ten Commandments again in Deuteronomy 5. There the Lord tells the people to "... **remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.**" Two of the greatest needs of man are for rest and worship, neither of which Israel was free to do in Egypt. So God gave the Sabbath as rest for the body and refreshment for the soul.

But here is where the problem arose: these Scribes and Pharisees and Rabbis, in their tradition, went further than the scripture. The Old Testament law regarding the keeping of the Sabbath did not prohibit picking a handful of grain to satisfy your immediate hunger. But the Pharisees added many rules and regulations to the Sabbath commandment that were nothing more than man made traditions. These traditions were rigid concerning Sabbath observance. The Talmud, the book of Jewish traditions has 24 chapters listing various Sabbath laws. On the Sabbath, you could not travel more than 3,000 feet from your house. You were not allowed to carry anything that weighed more than a dried fig. You couldn't carry a needle for fear you might sew something. Taking a

bath was forbidden. Water might splash on the floor and wash it. Women were not to look in a mirror; they might pull a gray hair.

Now here's the problem, personally for the Jew that was brought up in this particular religious culture: in short, the Sabbath day, like most of the other Jewish practices, had become a crushing burden upon these poor souls. The Sabbath itself had become a symbol of a suffocating religious bondage that was squeezing any life that was in these people, and effectively it was robbing them of their joy in God as individuals, as families and as a whole nation. If I could use the Lord's own illustration: the Sabbath had ceased to become a celebration, a wedding feast, and was now a funeral. It was no longer a wonderful new garment day, but it was a worn out rag; it was a leaking wineskin, it couldn't hold the new life of their Messiah who had come to them.

Having been observed by the Pharisees, the disciples were charged by the Pharisees with violating the Sabbath laws by plucking the grain and rubbing them in their hands. So get the point: the Pharisees weren't upset because the disciples picked the grain from a field - Deuteronomy 23 allowed them to do that - but according to their hair-splitting traditions, Jesus' disciples had broken the Sabbath by reaping, winnowing, threshing, and preparing a meal. So Jesus and His disciples were not breaking God's law, but they were transgressing a man-made tradition that they had enshrined to equal status with God's law - there is where the problem lay.

Christ addresses the charges levied by the Pharisees by stating ...

**The Answer: The Sabbath was not meant to restrict necessities (verse 25-26)**

Jesus answered "**Have you never read**"? Jesus appealed to the authority of the scriptures. The Lord Jesus believed in the authority of the Bible.

What was His answer? Well, look at it: verse 25 and 26, 'What did David do in this similar situation?'. Jesus is referring to 1 Samuel 21, you can read it when you get home: David had been anointed king, but instead of reigning as king he was hunted down by King Saul. When David and his men were hungry, he went to the house of God, that was the Tabernacle in Nob. He asked for bread, but there wasn't any, except the showbread that was only permitted to be eaten by the priest. Every Friday they baked 12 loaves of showbread, one for each tribe of Israel. They then placed this bread on the golden table of showbread in the tabernacle. Each week, they removed the old bread and replaced it with new. The old bread was given to feed the priests, and it was this bread that the priest gave to David and his men.

Jesus implies that David was justified in breaking the ceremonial law because his need for sustenance was greater than keeping the ceremonial law. Meeting true human need and compassion must take precedence over custom, ritual, ceremony and tradition.

The underlying truth of this is very instructive, because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, like King David, had been anointed King. He was their Messiah, and yet He's not reigning, He's rejected. Here are His disciples, His followers, like David, picking grain as they travel - which showed that just as Israel was in Saul's day,

Israel was in Jesus' day, they were not right with God. The Pharisees should have been feasting in the presence of the Lord Jesus and His disciples, but what were they doing? There were plotting to kill Him.

The Pharisees had got their priorities totally messed up. In Matthew's account of this event, he says that Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6, - the Lord says to them: **'But if you had known what this means, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice', you would not have condemned the guiltless** - Jesus says, you've got it all wrong! You're protecting your religious traditions at the expense of the needy.

**The Principle: The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. (verse 27)**

Jesus says that God's intent was for the Sabbath to be a blessing not a burden. The Sabbath was instituted by God for man's benefit, not for his bondage. It was God's loving provision. God gave it to man for rest, He gave it that they might worship Him and enjoy worship of Him. These legalists had turned what God had given to Israel for a benefit into a bondage, and it was killing people, it was squeezing out all the joy and satisfaction in their faith.

As human beings, our Creator did not design us to work seven days a week. Our bodies and souls both need rest, and taking off one day out every seven is good for us. Those of us with workaholic tendencies may find it difficult to get into the habit of a regularly scheduled day off, but we need it. It should always be something to which we look forward.

Every spiritual practice that we are engaged in should be judged upon this principle, is it a benefit or is it a bondage? If it robs us of our joy in God, if it prevents us helping others, that means it has become a bondage not a benefit - and, according to Christ, it has outlived its usefulness. That's the application: spiritual practices are for our benefit, not for our bondage.

The Sabbath was to benefit man to help him gain rest and to have a revived sense of God's presence. No where in the New Testament is the Christian commanded to observe the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath was the seventh day. It began at sunset Friday and ran through sunset Saturday. I believe the Lord's Day is the first day of the week corresponding to our Sunday.

J. Vernon McGee tells this story about a man who wanted to argue about the Sabbath. The man said, "I'll give you \$100 if you will show me where the Sabbath day has been changed." McGee answered, "I don't think it has been changed. Saturday is Saturday, it is the seventh day of the week, and it is the Sabbath day. I realize our calendar has been adjusted, and can be off a few days, but we won't even consider that point. The seventh day is still Saturday, and it is still the Sabbath day." The man got a gleam in his eye and said, "Then why don't you keep the Sabbath day if it hasn't been changed?" McGee answered, "the DAY hasn't changed, but I have been changed. I've been given a new nature now, I am joined to Christ; I am a part of the new creation. We celebrate the first day because that is the day He rose from the grave." That is what it means that the ordinances have been nailed to the cross in Colossians 2:14

The early church set aside the Lord's Day as a day of rest, worship, and celebration of Christ's resurrection.

Acts 20:7 **"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."**

1 Corinthians 16:2 **"On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."**

Revelation 1:10 **"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,"**

### **The Announcement: Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath and every other day!**

Jesus claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath. At least 32 times in the Old Testament you find the Sabbath described as **"the Sabbath of the Lord"** or **"Sabbath to the Lord."** The Sabbath belongs to the Lord, it is His Sabbath. So here Jesus claims to be that Lord, the Lord of the Sabbath!

What is Jesus doing? The same thing He did earlier in this chapter when He claimed the authority to forgive sin. He is claiming to be the Lord God. Christ declares He is Lord and is greater than the Sabbath. He therefore has the right to overrule man-made rules and tradition.

### **Christ as Lord of the Sabbath offers true rest to whoever comes to Him.**

Matthew 11:28-30 **"Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**

Hebrews 4:9-11 says, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

In other words, Jesus is our Sabbath. In Him we find rest from slavery to sin and from works of the law that could never justify us before God. As the Sabbath gave Israel the opportunity to celebrate the freedom and rest from slavery in Egypt; so the Lord's day provides an opportunity to celebrate the freedom and rest from the slavery of sin that comes through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you are here today and you have not found that perfect rest and peace with God, I invite you to come to Jesus today. God's purpose is not to condemn you but to save you. The Bible says, **"God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."** Yes, you have sinned. Yes, you have offended God's holiness, and yes, continue that way and you will die as you are and be lost for all eternity. But that is not God's will for you. His will is that you should be saved. I wonder would you come to Him today and fall upon His grace, ask Him for His mercy and find in Him a God who is willing to forgive, and to save completely.