

How to Spend a Day Off

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if you could keep page 1814 open, that would be really helpful. So we go through this passage tonight.
- Conflict, battles, standoffs, tension, struggle. We hear these words in our newspapers and on the television all the time to describe what's happening in our world, the situations people live in.
- Tonight, we've each of us stepped into a hot zone, I guess, when we started to look at this passage. There is as much risk here for each of us as on any battlefield.
- The hill being fought over is that of who Jesus is and therefore whether he has the authority he claims he has. The question is, who is Jesus?
- First, though, it's reconnaissance time because just like a gripping West Wing finale, or, you know, insert your other favourite TV show there, what we read tonight will pack much more of a punch if we remember what's happened before it.
- [1 : 1 5] We've got to get the context right. So to do that, we're going to take a bit of a whirlwind tour, so hold on to something. The letter of Mark opens with, right back to chapter 1, which is just over the page, page 812.
- It opens with Mark's claim that Jesus is God's chosen Messiah, the very Son of God. And what we've been hearing over the last couple of weeks has been the unveiling of the truth of that statement.
- Mark's validating his claim through relating Jesus' actions. Jesus begins his teaching, chapter 1, verse 15, saying that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near.
- Jesus' coming signals the beginning of a new glorious age as the promises of God are being fulfilled through him. Moving along, chapter 1, verse 21, sees Jesus in the synagogue, or in a synagogue, on the Sabbath, demonstrating his power over demons.
- And notice too, verse 27, how the people react to the words and actions of Jesus. He demonstrates authority in the way that he teaches, as the crowds have never heard before.
- [2 : 3 6] It's a new authority. It's different. And Jesus doesn't only tell the truth. His words have the power to restore and renew damaged people, as seen with the casting out of demons.
- Jesus is something else. Likewise on the Sabbath, a bit of a theme coming through here, chapter 1, verse 31, Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law, despite the general public's belief that healing wasn't something you really expected on the Sabbath.
- Look in verse 32, the people only came to him and bring their sick after sunset, after the end of the Sabbath. So, Jesus is healing the sick, he's casting out demons and doing quite unexpected things on the Sabbath.
- And despite his repetitive attempts to keep people from focusing on his power to heal and listen to his message, his popularity is exploding. At the same time, however, the disapproval of the Pharisees, the religious highbrow of the day, I guess, is building like a dark storm.

As of chapter 2, page 813, the Pharisees begin weighing in on Jesus' actions, calling his righteousness into question, possibly contemptuous of his taking away their audience, maybe worrying that, oh no, another fake Messiah is going to come up and the occupying Romans will quash another rebellion with violence.

[4 : 16] But, Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man, possibly referring to God's mighty ruler of the universe when we heard from Daniel a few weeks ago, and affirms that he does have the authority to forgive sins, effectively claiming equality with God in the presence of the suspicious Pharisees.

However, as we heard last week, the Pharisees are blinded to any possibility but blasphemy and don't see the truth even when the paralyzed man we met is healed.

The Pharisees then become a bit more overt. In chapter 2, verses 1 to 12, it was what they were thinking. Jesus guessed what they were thinking. Chapter 2, verse 16, over the page.

It's now about them questioning Jesus. They question the company that he hangs out with. Jesus' reply to their questions not only affirms his actions as being right, but he also points to himself as the one to deal with the sin, with the problem, with the sinners, and subtly condemns the Pharisees for not realizing the greatest need, their need for him to deliver them as well.

In verse 17, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.

[5 : 49] So the tension increases. Some folks ask, in the very next verse, why Jesus' disciples weren't fasting. Jesus answers that he is the reason.

There's no point in the disciples fasting now, a sign of distress, a sign of crying out to God. Because when Jesus is taken away will be the time for his disciples to mourn.

It just wouldn't make sense for it to happen now. Okay, so if you're still with me, you've done well. We're back into the passage as we are tonight. What we have though, looking down this timeline, we see Jesus and his disciples entering the scene in the middle of a grain field.

Verse 23. Jesus' disciples had had the munchies as they walked along. And as hiking Scroggen hadn't been invented yet, they were snacking down on some grain as they travelled with their teacher.

And before you know it, there are the Pharisees. Now, I don't know if you've seen Meerkat Manor, but that's kind of how I imagine it. We aren't given any introduction as to how the Pharisees get there, so they just jump out of their holes or something.

[7 : 05] But in any case, it's an ambush. They're there with dark purposes. Notice this time though, that things have gotten a bit more heated.

The accusations that the Pharisees make in verse 24 here are more blatant than in, say, chapter 2, verse 16. It's now a law that Jesus' disciples have supposedly broken rather than just a social norm.

Notice too, the accusation is not leveled at the disciples, but at Jesus. I mean, it would have been assumed that an issue in the disciples' way of life would have been the result of their copying the teacher or some failing of their teacher to instruct them in right paths.

So they're blaming Jesus for something they think the disciples have done. Now, as to what they're actually talking about, they don't make things real clear.

The Pharisees may be implying that Jesus' disciples had been travelling further than the minimum safe distance for a Sabbath, or that their taking the grain was reaping, like work, a form of work, and was breaking the Sabbath that way.

[8 : 21] It's interesting, just in reflection though, to note that in Jesus' trial at the Sanhedrin, in chapter 14, verse 55, I'll just read it out to you.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. There really wasn't anything to these accusations.

Nothing that would stand up in court. They were just calling names, really. Now, we might think, what's the big deal? I mean, what's the deal with the Sabbath?

I mean, okay, you do some work, or you might not do, you know, do some of the things that you usually do throughout the week. Well, throughout the Bible, the Sabbath is a big deal.

It's a major theme throughout the Bible. The Sabbath command by God to the people of Israel is the last one given by God before he gives the two tablets of the covenant to Moses in Exodus.

[9 : 22] Three times in that, in those few verses in Exodus 31, God commands the Israelites that they are to keep the Sabbath. It's essential to the Israelites' covenant with God, marking them as his own, and death was the punishment for those who didn't.

It was one of the significant marks of being an Israelite. Not keeping the Sabbath holy was a major crime committed by the people of Israel against God, and it displayed their need for God's mercy and deliverance from their sin.

Well, Jesus' reply to the accusation is that they, in fact, are the ones who don't understand the law, not he and his disciples, and they don't understand who he is. Moving on, we see in verse 25, Jesus brings up David and his men eating the consecrated bread in the house of the Lord, even though that bread was set aside by God's law for the priests alone to eat.

The silent message Jesus has for the Pharisees was, look, David wasn't condemned by God when he and his bunch of soldiers ate the bread that was most holy in this holy place.

And and you're condemning my disciples for having a bite to eat in a field. I mean, you don't understand God and you don't understand the Sabbath. As well, Jesus has just linked himself with David in the story.

[10 : 59] This is pretty significant, really, because back in 2 Samuel chapter 7, God promised King David that the throne of David shall be established forever.

So, Jesus here is, he's linked himself with David. He's saying that, actually, if you'll hear what I'm saying, I am the true king of Israel. I'm the one that God has promised to come.

So, he's revealing more of who he is. So, Jesus goes on, he teaches the Pharisees, first about the Sabbath, secondly about himself. In verse 27, Jesus says, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

I'm sorry, I'm reading from NOV. So, the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath. Just as God created the universe well, human relationships fulfilling, and gave his image bearers meaningful work to do, and if anyone wonders about that, check out Genesis 1, work's a good thing, so also a day to rest from work and humbly consider our creator's mercy and power was also intentionally created by him.

Therefore, it was important that the Sabbath wasn't just another day of work, but not so that the Sabbath was kept safe, Jesus said, but so that people were.

[12 : 34] The Sabbath didn't need to be protected from harm as such. It was made by God to prevent harm in the people who kept it, and in so doing bring glory to God.

It was a gift to people that the Israelites needed to remember. Jesus goes on to say that because the Sabbath is made for man, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

It might seem a bit random, but here's what I think is happening. the theme throughout these couple of chapters we've been looking at through Mark has been Jesus has been revealing that he is God's Messiah through his works.

He is the Son of God. Jesus is saying that the Sabbath is made for men, for humankind, and yet he, the Son of Man, is not subject to it.

He's actually put himself in the only other category available. Jesus is saying, I am not subject to the law, I rule over the law, because I am God.

[13 : 41] However, far from admitting their failure to recognize who Jesus is, the Pharisees' hearts grow colder, and by the start of chapter 3, they're out for blood.

I want to stop just for a second and ask the same question Jesus asked his followers in chapter 9. Who do you say Jesus is? We've heard the claims Jesus makes of having God's authority, being ruler over all the Sabbath, and we've seen him healing those who are broken and scarred by the effects of sin.

We each need to consider who this Son of Man is. There's no such thing as neutral ground here. It's one or the other. Who do you think Jesus is?

We'll see the truth of that, that there isn't any neutral ground when we look at the Pharisees in these next couple of verses. So, by chapter 3, we've gone from a lame ambush in a field, really, to a really public showdown in the Pharisees' home turf.

How will Jesus react to that? We know from the chapters before that we just had a flick through that Jesus often healed the sick who were at synagogues he taught at on the Sabbath.

[15 : 04] That was an established pattern. So, here we are, the perfect set-up for the Pharisees, lots of potential witnesses, and very public.

So, they've got their, the entrapment is set, I guess. But Jesus is never daunted or fooled. In verse 3, he invites the man with the withered, functionally useless, so he couldn't use it, hand to stand up, and all attention is on them.

Jesus poses the question to those he knew were out to condemn him. Which is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save life or destroy it.

Now, Jesus seems to be saying two things here. First, he's demanding whether it's lawful to heal this man, or to leave him as he is, and do evil by not acting.

To those who are waiting to pounce on disobedience, Jesus is saying that, look, failing to restore this man to full health would be something worthy of condemnation.

[16 : 14] Not the other way around, you've got it backwards. There also seems to be another comparison too, though. Here stands Jesus, God in flesh, healer of sinners, and God's answer to King David's empty throne, looking to heal and restore this poor man's body to full health out of compassion.

At the same time, a silent man, observing, want to use this good act to execute Jesus. death. Jesus wants life and the Pharisees want death.

We see Jesus' concern even for the conspirators. He even wants life for them. We see it in his rage and distress at their stubborn hearts in verse 5.

You see that? Jesus held up a mirror to their sin, but the Pharisees and those working with them closed their eyes, preferring to imagine what they want rather than facing the ugliness of their guilt, and the glory of the Saviour come to deal with it.

So turning to the crippled man, Jesus commands him to stretch out his hand, and it's instantly revealed, restored. You can hear the strong echo of God, a creation in Genesis here, that God created with words, and Jesus has recreated with words.

[17 : 43] It's just another mark up on the board. He's saying, this is who I am. Jesus continues to reveal who he is as his ministry continues after this passage throughout Mark, with the ultimate revelation coming not by a flag of military victory as some expected, or a throne of political power, but a bloodied cross and an empty tomb.

You see the murder being plotted by the Pharisees and the Herodians in verse 6 right at the end of our section here from chapter 3. Even that isn't outside God's plan.

It's redeemed by him. This is how the Son of Man certified his identity as Messiah, by conquering the power of sin and death on the cross for all who believe.

Well, we're at the end of our passage, and I want to ask, in the light of all this evidence, how does who we think Jesus is affect the way we live?

When we work, do we work with Jesus' identity in mind? Do we trust that he's done all that's necessary for us to be right with God?

[19 : 02] And do we ask him to help us to live to please him? Or do we rush and cram in our insecurity to get as much money or status or nice warm feelings as we can?

And does our life also reflect that, as Jesus said, resting from work to do good to others and help us to remember God and all his mercy towards us, is that the way that we live when we rest?

Or do we live as if we've earned the rest? We've kind of built up a few credits, we don't have to be a Christian for a couple of days. Discarding Jesus' teaching that we've been given rest as a gift for our benefit to be used to glorify God.

Our society talks a lot about progress and being more efficient. But we can't really progress in living lives that honour God if we don't listen to him. If you haven't made a decision to trust Jesus, I want to encourage you to humbly ask God for forgiveness and deliverance from living in ways that reflect a lack of trust in him.

Mark chapter 2 verse 17 says, The Son of Man came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Knowing you're unworthy doesn't disqualify you from asking for God's help.

[20 : 33] It's actually an essential first step. You need to know you need God's help. God has mercy on everyone who turns to him because of the death of Jesus Christ his Son in our place to turn away God's anger from us.

God's forgiveness. Maybe ask him in one of our prayer times that's coming up after the sermon. Ask him for that forgiveness and that you can receive the gift of eternal life from him.

However, if you've already made that decision, how are things? Is Jesus still the one you depend on for a right and healthy relationship with God? Do you work unceasingly for money instead or approval instead of just trusting Jesus that he's enough?

Or maybe work's doing okay. Maybe you're honoring God by the way you treat your co-workers, setting godly goals, joyfully giving back to God from the harvest you get.

Maybe you have trouble being obedient in resting instead. We allow ourselves to get so busy sometimes for so many different reasons and can feel like we've got to keep working or what we've received from God will crash and burn around us.

[22 : 03] Simply put, we don't rest because we don't quite trust God to take care of our future. But as Mark stated at the start of the gospel, this whole letter is about the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

We can safely trust Jesus with what is valuable to us. Because by his death on the cross, in our place, he offers that which is most valuable, forgiveness and a recreated relationship with our loving Heavenly Father and God.

He has to be with each other. Maybe a practical step for you if you find this hard, if you find resting hard, could be to ask God to help you to learn what keeping the Sabbath means today and discuss it with some other Christians as you work through that, as you learn.

Well, in the light of what we've heard and learnt in Mark over these last couple of weeks, let's keep coming to Jesus, the one true Saviour and the Son of God, when we work and when we rest all the days of our lives and put our faith in Him.

Amen.