

Dead Religion on Display

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 March 2019

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] If you've not yet done so, please turn your Bible to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 2.!

This morning we will be directing our attention to verses 23 through chapter 3, verse 6.

We are continuing our sermon series in the Gospel of Mark, and this morning, as I said, we will direct our attention to these verses 23 in chapter 2 through chapter 3, verse 6.

It is not usual for us to have a section of Scripture that spans over two chapters. As we have this morning, I think it serves as a reminder to us that chapter and verse divisions in the Bible are not inspired.

They have been put there to help us to reference Scripture, but sometimes they're not helpful because they can actually separate what should be together. And this is one example of them, of that.

[1 : 26] I'm reading from the English Standard Version. One Sabbath, he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

And the Pharisees were saying to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? And he said to them, have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him? How he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the bread of the presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat.

And also gave it to those who were with him. And he said to them, the Sabbath was not made for man, but, sorry, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.

[2 : 50] And they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, come here.

And he said to them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent.

And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him how to destroy him.

This is quite a fascinating account when we consider it. And we must remember that Mark is being very intentional as he puts together his gospel that he's communicating.

[3 : 59] And what he has done is he has put together these side-by-side accounts of Jesus and the Pharisees. Up to this point, we see that Mark has been showing Jesus as the promised king, as the divine son, as the last Adam and the true Israel.

And last week we saw how he was showing Jesus as the merciful physician and as the beloved bridegroom. And these two Sabbath encounters, Mark wants us to see Jesus again.

He is giving us another view of Jesus, another scene in the life of Jesus where he wants us to see who Jesus is. He's putting Jesus on display, as it were.

He's putting Jesus on display, as it were.

And they were threatened by the ministry of Jesus. And what troubled them was they recognized that even the people recognized the difference between them and Jesus.

[5 : 32] And so Mark is giving us this picture. But remember that Mark is not just starting to show us the Pharisees. He's been doing that starting from chapter 2. Every account that we have in chapter 2, Mark focuses on some aspect of the Pharisees.

So we would notice that, and even going back when we see in the temple, Jesus, sorry, not in the temple, in the house with the paralytic, in verses 1 through 12.

When Jesus heals the paralytic, they were questioning. The Pharisees were saying, how could this man talk about forgiving sins? Who does he think he really is?

And so they complained. And then we see in verses 15 through 17, when Jesus went to the dinner at Matthew's house. And as he was reclining with sinners, they also complained that this man eats with sinners.

And then in verses 18 through 22, which were considered last week by Brother Lyndon, and he did a fine job, an excellent job serving us.

[6 : 37] Though the Pharisees are not the ones who we see are being hostile towards Jesus, we see this question being raised, why do your disciples not fast?

And the Pharisees and their disciples, and John and his disciples, they fast. So it's still a question surrounding the Pharisees and their practice. And then in this current passage that we are considering this morning, the Pharisees are featured very prominently.

And it appears that they're seeking out Jesus. They're following him around. They're trying to accuse him in some particular way. And the issue here is the Sabbath.

And what we see in these two accounts is the dead religion of the Pharisees on display. Mark is putting it on display for his readers. Why does Mark do this?

What Mark does is because he wants us to see that dead religion is about man-centered worship, not Christ-centered worship. Mark wants us to see that.

[7 : 51] He wants us to see that dead religion is about man-centered worship, not Christ-centered worship. And what Mark wants us to see from this is when you consider that the Sabbath was the most visible expression of worship to God in the nation of Israel.

It was the most outward expression that you actually served God. And so when the Sabbath came for the people of Israel, they stopped working.

And they turned their hearts towards worship. The Sabbath was really about two things. It was a day to rest their bodies and a day to worship their God.

And really, it was supposed to be the best day of the week. It was supposed to be the day where they didn't have to work. And they could just gather with others and they could worship God who gave them the strength to be able to work.

And so you would think that perhaps the best day to encounter a Pharisee was on the Sabbath.

You would think, you would think, I mean, come on.

[9 : 04] They should always be on their best behavior. But you would think the day you want to encounter a Pharisee is on the day when he's not working. And all he's doing is turning his heart to God and worshiping God.

But that's not what we see in this account. What we see in this account is that the Pharisees were far from the kinds of people you would want to encounter on even a day like the Sabbath day.

And you have to ask yourself, how is it possible that people who claim to worship God and actually claim to be the foremost examples of what it means to worship God can conduct themselves in this way?

How could they do that? How could they represent God and conduct themselves in the way that we see them conducting themselves in these two passages? Well, the answer is simple.

Their religion was dead. And Mark wants to put their dead religion on display to help us to see what it produces and to help us to see that dead religion cannot save and dead religion cannot transform the heart.

[10 : 25] I'm going to offer two reasons this morning why dead religion is not able to produce the life that God intends for us to have, those of us who follow him.

And then I'm going to take any questions that you might have. First, in these two Sabbath accounts with Jesus and the Pharisees, what we see is that dead religion hardens the heart.

Dead religion hardens the heart. And so in this first account, we see the heart of the Pharisees towards the disciples of Jesus.

They were walking through the grain fields and they were plucking grain. Now, why were they doing that? Well, Mark, sorry, Matthew tells us in his parallel account of this same event that the disciples were hungry.

And on the Sabbath, they're walking through the grain fields, no doubt making their way to the temple. And as they did, they just plucked off heads of grain and they began to rub them in their hands and they were just eating them.

[11 : 54] And the Pharisees did not care about the fact that they were obviously hungry to do that. And the Pharisees complained to Jesus and they said, why are your disciples breaking the Sabbath?

Why are they doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? The question is, where in the Old Testament does it say that plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath to eat is breaking the Sabbath law?

Well, the answer is nowhere. It's nowhere to be found. But the Pharisees had come up with some 39 additional commandments to the fourth commandment.

To the commandment that you are to rest and worship on the seventh day, on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees added 39 other commandments in terms of things you can do and things you can't do on the Sabbath day.

And if you did those things, they ruled that you were breaking the law. But they not only did that with the Sabbath, with all the Ten Commandments, they added 613 other commandments to the Ten Commandments.

[13 : 08] 613 other do's and don'ts to the commandments. But as it relates to the Sabbath day, they added an additional 39 commands about what people could do and what they couldn't do on the Sabbath day.

But the purpose of the Sabbath was very simple. It was God's gift to his people of a full day off that they could rest their bodies and they could worship their God.

But the Pharisees missed this. They were so focused on their dead religion and on their legalism that all they were doing, instead of resting their bodies, they were busy bodies.

And they were policing everyone who went around, telling them what they could do, what they couldn't do. And if they saw someone breaking one of the laws, they would call that person out. And so they missed the goal of the commandment altogether, as we can see.

And so how does Jesus respond? Well, notice that Jesus does not get into a debate about the Sabbath with them. He doesn't do that. That was just going to be a back and forth, a long debate about the Sabbath.

[14 : 26] Instead, as a true teacher, what he does is he asks a question. Look again at the question that he asked them. In verse 24, sorry, in verse 25, he says, Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he was hungry and those who were with him?

How he entered into the house of God and how he ate bread that only the priest was supposed to eat. So what Jesus does is Jesus does not enter into a debate with them about the Sabbath.

Instead, what he does is he engages them about Scripture. And what he does is he points them to 1 Samuel chapter 21, where this account is found. And there's no debate here.

There is no, oh, well, David could have done what he did. No. Based on the law, only the priest was supposed to eat this holy bread, this bread of the presence. And when you read the account, you would see that the priest recognized that he told David, he said, This bread is only supposed to be eaten by the priest.

And Jesus is essentially endorsing what David did out of necessity of being hungry, that David was able to eat the bread that God said don't eat.

[15 : 53] Only the priest was supposed to eat it. And really what Jesus is doing is Jesus is arguing from a higher example to show the Pharisees how wrong they actually are.

Just imagine that. Imagine a God who would say, This bread is for the priest to eat. And then somebody comes in who is hungry. And he says, No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

That's not for you. You go hungry. Imagine that God. That's the God the Pharisees thought they served. And so the Pharisees had no problem saying to the disciples, Look, tough luck if you didn't pick grain yesterday.

You're hungry? Go without until you find someone who picked grain yesterday. And you would have some of that. But you cannot pick grain because picking grain is work. You pick the grain and that's work, they say.

And that was the attitude of the Pharisees. That was the religion of the Pharisees. That was the dead religion of the Pharisees.

[16 : 58] And Jesus is really saying to them, Jesus is saying, No, that's not the gift that God gave to men. God gave the gift of the Sabbath to man.

That's the point he makes in verse 27. The Sabbath was made for man. In other words, man came before the Sabbath. God didn't create the Sabbath and then say, Man, you go and serve the Sabbath.

God created man. And then he gave him the gift of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is to serve him. He is not to serve the Sabbath. And so for these disciples on the Sabbath day, as they were hungry, there was nothing wrong with them satisfying their hunger by picking the grain on that Sabbath day. Now notice, Jesus is not making a case for getting rid of the Sabbath laws and just breaking it, doing whatever you want. He's not making a case to say, It's fine to go and harvest on the Sabbath. He's not saying that at all. He's making the point that the Sabbath law was not given to hurt man in a circumstance of necessity.

[18:13] And indeed, all of God's law. All of God's law is given to us as a beneficial gift, not as a punitive rule that we are supposed to actually be following.

He was pointing out to the Pharisees that plucking grain to satisfy hunger on the Sabbath day was not unlawful.

But the Pharisees missed that. But it's very clear how the Pharisees viewed life even clearer in the next account, which we find in verses 1 through 6 in chapter 3.

Mark tells us that there was a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. And knowing that Jesus had the power to heal, you would think that what would be in the hearts of the Pharisees is, Oh, great.

He's here today. Let Jesus heal him. We know Jesus could heal him. Because see, with Jesus, there were no ifs and buts. There was some... Some...

[19:26] The last Christianity Explored class we had, or the one before that, can't remember which, but there was a lady in the class, and she was telling us about this friend of hers who invited her to this one church that they had some prophet in.

And so she went. And this guy came, and he was, you know, just really just playing games, not a true prophet. And he came to her and told her, he said, The baby you desire, God is going to give you that baby.

And she thought to herself, but that's a lie because I just had a baby. She just had a young baby. And then he started to tell her God was going to give her husband. He said, well, that's a lie. I'm married. And so she began to talk with her friend afterwards.

And the friend said to him, I said, the prophet, off tonight. You've got to come back tomorrow night. He off tonight. Jesus was not like that. Jesus was always on. When Jesus stretched forth his hand to heal, or when Jesus said, be healed, you were healed.

The Pharisees knew that. The Pharisees heard the stories. They saw the healings. Remember, the word about Jesus had gone far and wide.

[20:43] It was so certain that, remember when the men came to Jesus with the paralytic, they were so sure they could get him to Jesus, he was going to be healed. They opened the roof. There was no question that this man had the opportunity to be healed.

And you would think the Pharisees would be praying, Oh, Jesus, heal him. That's not what they're thinking. They're watching to see if Jesus is going to heal him on the Sabbath.

Mark tells us, so that they might accuse him. That's what it says in verse one. Look at verse one. Sorry, verse two. And they watched Jesus to see whether he might heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

This is dead religion on display. They still have not gotten the point that the Sabbath was for man, not man for the Sabbath.

God created the Sabbath to serve man. And what we see is the hardness of their hearts from their dead religion.

[21:55] That they could care less about a man with a withered hand. They cared more about keeping their 39 laws about the Sabbath, one of which was, if you healed on the Sabbath, that's work.

And so you can't heal on the Sabbath. So how does Jesus respond? Well, again, he responds as a true teacher, and he doesn't get into a debate with them, but he asks a question.

First, he calls the man to come to him. And then in verse four, he says to them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life, or to kill?

Now that's not a difficult question. We can go in children's church and ask that question, and the smallest child will tell us the answer to that. We all know the answer to it. It is lawful to do good. It is lawful to save life. We know that. But how does the Pharisees respond to that question? Well, Mark tells us. They were silent.

[23 : 07] They said nothing. And you see the hypocrisy behind refusing to answer that question. They were only interested in upholding the interpretation of the Sabbath.

They had no interest in the truth. And in verse five, notice, tells us that Jesus looked around at them, and with anger, and when you look at the meaning of that word, it really means anger. That's what it means. Jesus was angry at them as he was in the temple. He was angry, and he was grieved at what? Their hardness of heart.

Not that they didn't answer his question. He was grieved and angry at their hardness of heart. Their hearts were hard, so hard that they would see this man with a withered hand, and they have no compassion, no desire to see him healed.

They just want to uphold their man-made rules and regulations. They had no compassion whatsoever on this man, who could be instantly healed by Jesus.

[24 : 20] They had another agenda. And so Jesus says to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and it was restored.

Very interestingly, Jesus is so wise. Remember the account we saw a few sermons earlier when Jesus encountered the leper?

Mark says Jesus stretched his hand forth and touched him. Jesus could have spoken the word to that leper, but he didn't. He wanted to identify with that man.

He wanted to do for him what he perhaps had not experienced in years. No human would have touched him. And yes, Jesus touched him, and Jesus healed him.

That was an act that Jesus did. Jesus doesn't do that here. They can't accuse Jesus of working, because he didn't stretch his hand forth to do the work of healing.

[25 : 17] He simply told the man, you stretch your hand forth, and the hand was healed. And they were furious. See, because they were somehow thinking Jesus would heal in some active kind of way that they could get him, but they could not in any way challenge him.

They wanted to challenge him. They were watching to see if he would do it, but he didn't in the way that they wanted him to do it. Brothers and sisters, that's dead religion on display in the synagogue. In the place where God is to be seen in all of his greatness and at his best among these Pharisees who claim to uphold the law, they're to be putting God on display and representing God.

And what you see is a gross misrepresentation of God and who he really is. We see hard-hearted, men who are steeped in dead religion.

There's an account in Luke's gospel, in Luke chapter 13, where Jesus healed a woman in the synagogue. She was bent over and Jesus healed her from the infirmity that she had been with for many, many years.

[26 : 40] Some of you may remember the story, but here's what the ruler of the synagogue, here's his response, recorded in Luke 13, verse 14.

We read, But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant, because Jesus healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, There are six days in which to work, sorry, there are six days in which work ought to be done.

Come on those days and be healed. Not on the Sabbath day. Imagine that. You get sick on Monday, but wait till Saturday to come.

Don't come, sorry, don't wait till Saturday to come. Get healed on that particular day. You get healed, you get sick on the Sabbath day, well, don't wait until today, don't come today, you have to wait until you get healed tomorrow.

That's dead religion. That's dead religion. Those who claim to represent God, the ruler of the synagogue, had this heart towards a woman who had been sick for years, hunched over for years.

[27 : 48] And he's very instructed to see how Jesus deals with him and how Jesus talks to him about that woman and how blind he was to make the connection to see that there was nothing wrong with healing this woman on the Sabbath compared to the other things that they do on the Sabbath, like leading an animal to get water, loosing an animal who is tied up and taking him to go and get water.

Jesus says, you're so hypocritical, you consider that more important that you could do that on the Sabbath, but I cannot heal this woman on the Sabbath. And that's because of the hardness of their heart in their dead religion.

It misrepresents God and who he is. In Matthew's account of this same account that we're reading in Mark, in Mark's gospel, in Matthew chapter 12, very identical account.

Matthew shares an aspect of this encounter that we don't find in Mark's gospel and Brother Lyndon referred to it last week in his sermon.

It's Matthew chapter 12, verse 7. Matthew records Jesus as saying to these Pharisees, And if you had known what it means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.

[29 : 16] And this is what he said to them when they were condemning the disciples for eating grain on the Sabbath, plucking the grain and eating it. Jesus said to them, if you had understood what it means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have done what you did.

You would not have seen fault with what they did. you would have said it was fine. The Pharisees did not understand what God desires.

Even though they went about writing their 613 other laws, they still didn't understand what God desires. Here Jesus in Matthew 12, 7 is quoting from Hosea 6, verse 6.

Here's what it says. For I desire steadfast love, and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. What does that mean?

I desire steadfast love, and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. In a nutshell, what that is saying to us is that God desires worship that affects our hearts, that make us compassionate, rather than the bringing of our sacrifices, the bringing of bulls and goats and rams and lambs and incense and grain, but leaves our hearts cold, leaves our hearts lacking in compassion and mercy towards others.

[30 : 51] God desires mercy more than obedience to the law.

More than obedience to conforming to and complying with what the law calls us to. He's essentially saying in Hosea, he's saying, you're emphasizing, you're placing the emphasis on bringing your sacrifices, getting the lamb, getting the ram, bringing them, sacrificing them, he says, but I desire more than that.

I desire mercy. I desire compassion. Why? Because that reflects me more than your bringing of your sacrifices.

And see, brothers and sisters, if in all of our serving, in all of our being here this morning, in all the things that we do in God's name, if it doesn't result in showing mercy and compassion for the needy, like the hungry disciples, or like this suffering man, we don't truly know God.

We don't truly know God as God wants us to know him. God doesn't want us to know him in our bringing of sacrifices and keeping rules. He wants us to know him in mercy and in compassion because that's his heart and when that becomes our heart, it's an evidence that he has touched our lives.

[32 : 21] And I'll say this. We represent God more when we show mercy and compassion than when we bring judgment.

We represent and we demonstrate our relationship with God more when we show mercy and compassion than when we show judgment and holding down the rule in all of its full weight without the understanding of the heart and the spirit behind it.

It's important for us to remember. And see, this is why one of the basic guiding rules that we should have as Christians is this.

If we're going to make a mistake, let's try to make that mistake on the side of mercy. Not on the side of law, not on the side of judgment, not on the side of legalism.

If we're going to make a mistake, let it be, but I made a mistake giving mercy. But oh, let it not be like these Pharisees where they can only look at their rules and their regulations and what is required.

[33 : 45] And so how can we know? How can we know whether we understand what this means? That we are to show mercy. That God desires mercy more than sacrifice.

I think one of the ways we can know is we can evaluate our hearts towards the needy. Are we motivated by compassion and mercy? For example, how do we respond when maybe somebody new comes among us who gets some things wrong?

Maybe it's a young lady and she comes and she dresses him modestly. Are you more aware of the immodesty of her clothing than you are grateful that she is here and able to be taught the things of God and the ways of God?

Maybe it's a man who is clearly and obviously addicted to alcohol and drugs. It affects his ability to work, take care of himself and take care of his obligations and have a stable life.

Is your heart wishing that he just go away? Or is it more what can I do to help? What can we do to help? Is one of patience and understanding and compassion?

[35 : 16] A lot of times and I should not even say a lot of times every time there's a story behind every life and sometimes we don't realize how much we have in common with some of the people that we don't want to give the time of day.

They have a story and if we take time to hear the story it will change our attitude towards them. God knows the story God knows every bit of them.

We're the ones who need to take time to get to know them. But the whole purpose of serving God is to make us more like God to transform us to be like him and so when we misrepresent him how great is that misrepresentation and the greatest misrepresentation of God is to misrepresent his love and his mercy and his compassion.

You know the Bible doesn't say God is judgment but he judges. The Bible says God is love.

God is merciful. God is patient. judgment. God is long-suffering. Yeah, he does judge. He does discipline.

[36 : 46] But he is not those things. He's not the discipline. He's not the judgment. Those are things he does. He is love and he's filled with compassion. And you know what?

If there was anyone to take objection to what the disciples were doing on that day should have been Jesus because he understood the law perfectly. But he didn't.

And if there's anyone to have had the greatest mercy on that man in the temple, it would have been Jesus because his heart is perfect in every way.

But the Pharisees were quite different. Pharisees as a group, dead, in the sense that they existed in the day of Jesus, don't exist anymore.

They're all dead. But their spirit is not dead. And their religion is not dead. Their religion and their spirit, they're very much alive.

[37 : 58] dead. And that dead religion hardens people's hearts and we are not exempt from it. We are not exempt from it. If we practice dead religion, it will harden our hearts as well.

We will be just like these Pharisees, don't want to meet us even on Sunday. Don't want to cross us on a Sunday. But that's what all dead religion does.

Not only does dead religion harden our hearts, what we see in this passage is that dead religion blinds our eyes. And this brings me to my second and final point.

Dead religion blinds the eyes. Yes, it blinds the eyes to the needs of people like the hungry disciple or this suffering man. Even as we do all manner of things in the name of God, in serving God, dead religion enables us to see all the wrong but not the right.

We can see the misbehaving young boy or girl, but we cannot see the opportunities that we may have to make a difference in their lives. Dead religion will blind us and cause us to have wrong priorities.

[39 : 20] It will cause us to see faster all the things that are wrong before we can see the things that are right. But you know, of all these things that dead religion blinds us to, the most important thing that dead religion blinds us to, and I should not even say thing, the one who dead religion blinds us to is dead religion blinds us to the Lord himself.

Dead religion blinds us to Christ. And really, that's the biggest tragedy in this story. The biggest tragedy is not that the disciples were fussed out by the Pharisees because they picked grain and ate it.

The biggest tragedy was not that this man whose hand was withered got no compassion from the Pharisees. Friends, the biggest tragedy in this account is that the Pharisees were blind to who Jesus was.

They were blind to who he was, they were blind to why he came, and they were blind to what it means to follow God. And so there they are.

If you want to think of it in a very vivid way, it's like having a broom, and instead of sweeping the floor with the broom, you have the broom turned upside down, you're scorching it with the broom

stick. That was the religion of the Pharisees.

[40 : 48] Not sweeping with the broom, but scorching with the broom stick, doing quite the opposite of what God called them to do. But their blindness doesn't begin here.

Mark is showing us in a continuing way their blindness. He was already showing us their blindness. Jesus, healing the sick, showing himself as the merciful physician, as the beloved bridegroom, going back.

Jesus is the one who is showing himself to be the last Adam, the true Israel, the promised king. Mark is showing all these things about him, and even now, they are blind to who Jesus is.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 28 of chapter 2. After saying to the Pharisees that the Sabbath was not made for man, nor man for the Sabbath, he says, so the son of man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees missed what Jesus said here. Let us not miss it this morning. Jesus says two things. First of all, Jesus is saying that he is Lord.

[42 : 20] Notice Notice the construction of that sentence. The son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath. In other words, he's saying he is Lord of more than the Sabbath, but he's Lord even of the Sabbath.

And so the idea is the Sabbath was made for man as a gift given to man. Jesus is saying I'm not under that. He says I'm over that.

He says I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. And in essence what Jesus is really saying is I'm the one who has given the Sabbath. And bigger than that what he's really saying is I am the one who has given the Lord the Lord that God has given.

He's the Lord giver. And Jesus is certainly saying that he is God by this statement that he is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Essentially what Jesus would be saying is the Sabbath was given by me. as a gift to man that he would seize his worship and he would worship me.

[43 : 40] That he would worship God. And you may be tracking in your head thinking well I thought God the Father gave the Ten Commandments.

It's very interesting when you look at what scripture says you can't just take it in one place but you have to take all of it. So even though when we look in the Old Testament in Exodus 20 for example and we see that God the Father giving the law this statement of Jesus has to cause us to understand in a broader sense the giving of the law.

The law was given by God Father Son and Holy Spirit. And Jesus says I am Lord of the Sabbath. when you rest and you worship you worship me. The Pharisees were blind.

They were blind to that. Couldn't see it. Let us not be blind to it this morning. Let us not be blind to the fact that Mark is putting on display that Jesus says he is Lord even of the Sabbath.

[45 : 05] He's helping us to see who Jesus really is. This brothers and sisters is the biggest tragedy in this account.

Not that they were merciless towards the disciples and would see them go hungry. Or not that they didn't care that this man could come to the temple with a withered hand and leave.

You know I was thinking about that. I'm always moved by people who have obvious invisible tragedy in their lives and they continue to openly and consistently relate to God.

And this man coming to the temple is an evidence of that. An evidence that he was not holding God or accusing God for his withered hand. So many people do.

So many people meet tragedies in life and even some who profess Christ when tragedy hits they turn their backs and they walk away. But we see this man coming to the temple despite his condition and despite the temptation to accuse God and the Pharisees would have him turned away in his condition.

[46 : 20] But Jesus is saying that true worship that's intended to be on the Sabbath is intended to be directed towards him.

Mark helps us to see the conclusive evidence of the blindness of the Pharisees in verse 6. We read in Mark chapter 3 verse 6, the Pharisees rent out and immediately held council with the Herodians against him how to destroy him.

The Herodians were a political party. The Herodians were Jews who supported Herod Antipas who was really a vassal ruler of Rome.

Rome controlled all of Israel and they had him appointed as the local ruler over the people in Galilee.

They were not religious people. They were political. They were alive with Rome. The blindness of the Pharisees is that they see more in common with the Herodians than they see with Jesus Christ.

[47 : 40] The blindness of the Pharisees is that they do not see the gross sin involved in even allying themselves with these Herodians. And why do they do it?

They do it, Mark tells us, to get their counsel how to destroy him. And that's not destroy his reputation. If they could do that, they would. That's how to destroy him.

The blindness of the Pharisees. And this is what dead religion does. And this is why in some religions you can have people or some people who are so in dead religion.

When I say dead religion, there are Christian forms of dead religion as well. Not just false religions like Islam, but Christian religions as well, where there will be people who say, God told me to kill him.

God told me to do that. And it is so contrary to what God is and who he is. They see nothing wrong with this God who they are so zealous to worship.

[48 : 47] They've created these 613 other laws. They see nothing wrong with going to the Herodians and conspiring how they might destroy Jesus, one who only did good, healed, taught, but they conspired to destroy him.

Mark's gospel continues and what we will see is in the end. The Pharisees and the Herodians, they were no different, they were all the same, they were all blind, they were all blind to who Jesus was, and so they conspired in the end to kill him.

The Herodians blinded by their politics, Pharisees blinded by their dead religion. Brothers and sisters, the world is not interested in dead religion.

The world could do better than that. The world could answer the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees, is it lawful to do good or evil?

Is it lawful to save life or take life? They could answer that. The world would have no problem offering food to those hungry disciples on the Sabbath day.

[50 : 14] Have no problem doing whatever they can to get that suffering man some help and some relief. The sad thing is, sinners at their worst are better than dead religious people at their best.

God's love and show more mercy and show more compassion. It's one thing to misrepresent an organization, misrepresent a country.

It's a totally different thing to misrepresent the living God. a number of years ago, I remember, some of you may remember this, Rosie O'Donnell came and she had a cruise that was exclusively for homosexuals and word came and there were some Christians who felt it was their duty to go on Bay Street and picket and shout slurs at them and I remember seeing some of the footage of it and I was ashamed.

I was embarrassed, I was ashamed and at the time I was writing a letter in the Guardian, I was writing a column, sorry, and I remembered thinking this and I wrote it, if I was downtown when that demonstration was happening, I would have walked on the side of the homosexuals, not on the side of the Christians.

And some people gave me a hard time for that, but I will say that until I die because they misrepresented who God is. And some of those people probably had the best opportunity they had up close with someone who claims to represent the God who in his word opposes that sinful lifestyle.

[52 : 27] And they missed the opportunity to represent him as one who is merciful and compassionate and only outlaws that lifestyle because it is a harmful lifestyle.

Not because he has hang-ups about things. He loves people. He wants good gifts for them. The world can do without dead religion.

The world does not need that religion. What the world needs is a religion that is merciful. The religion of Jesus, one that does justice and shows mercy.

One that calls us to walk humbly with God and we offer them even the Christian version of that, dead religion, it's still at the end of the day, dead religion can't change our hearts and it can't change their hearts and their lives.

True and pure religion has a heart and eyes for people and for God. Shows compassion for people and demonstrates true worship towards God.

[53 : 41] And Jesus is the one who represents this. Jesus is the one who offers this. Mark wants us to see that. But the Pharisees were blind to him and they couldn't see.

The question this morning is what about us? Do we see Jesus for who he is? Or do we just see him as a religious leader?

Maybe as one whose ways we follow, but we haven't captured his heart to know his mission and to be involved in that mission.

Brothers and sisters, the mercy and the grace of God is supposed to mark the life of every single person who claims to be transformed by it.

Anything less is dead religion. If it can't touch our lives and change our lives, you can rest assured, you can't do anything for the world.

[54 : 56] We pray and then we'll take some questions. Father, thank you for your word this morning. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who is the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who is merciful and compassionate and who calls those who follow him to do likewise.

But help us to represent you faithfully to the world, not perfectly because we can't do that, but Lord, may we do so faithfully.

and help us to be those who would show mercy and compassion to those who are needy, to those who are suffering.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Any questions from the sermon? No questions?

Jen has a question. Not so much a question, but some experiences that I've always not really known how to handle.

[56 : 35] Oftentimes, I come across people that are begging for money, and my fleshly response, especially when they've got the bottle underneath their arm, is I can't give you money to feed the addiction.

So would that be an example of dead religion, of I'm focused more on the law, of you shouldn't be doing that? How would you respond to that?

How do I... exercise mercy and kindness and compassion for someone? I would say no, because giving money is not your only option. One option is to get the person food, and that's the wisest option.

If you really want to help them, that's what you do, because... And people who are addicted, in their sober moments will tell you this, that many times they don't set out to defraud people.

They genuinely are hungry. And so they'll say, could you give me something, I promise I'm going to buy food with it. And you do, and the temptation takes them in another direction, where they think, well, someone is going to give me food, so I'll buy drugs, or I'll buy alcohol.

[57 : 50] So many times they don't set out to do that. I'm sure some do, some are con artists, but what I practice, and I heard many other people say the same, sometimes it takes a bit more time.

It's easy to throw money at it. You can throw money at it, and you go on your way. But it'll take a bit more time to maybe divert, and go to the nearest fast food place, or if you're near home or something, and get them food.

So I would say no, that's not demonstrating dead religion if you don't give them money. I would say it would be dead religion if you don't want to be inconvenienced, and I know sometimes we don't have the flexibility, but sometimes we do.

And I think it is our hearts are better measured when we have the opportunity than when we don't.

So for example, you're coming to church on a Sunday morning, and you encounter that person.

What do you do? Is it more important to show up to church and perform what we do, or is it more important to respond to that person in the moment? And I would say mercy and compassion would say to respond to that person in the moment.

[59 : 07] And this was the story that Jesus was telling about the Good Samaritan, how the religious men who found him on the road had to get to the temple to do their religious duties, so they passed on the other side.

Yeah, so I think that is a better expression of where our hearts are when we have the time to do it.

Now maybe during the week when you're getting back to work and you know you only have five minutes to get there, the person's asking for money, you see the bottle, you can't give them money, that's different.

You get to work because that's what you're obligated to do. I wouldn't advise go to your boss about half an hour later and say, oh, you know, I couldn't come because this hungry person, I need to get

them some food to be a good Christian.

You may be a good Christian but not have a job. So you don't want to do that. Anyone else? No? You may actually have covered it in your comment already but there is always the need, well, there's the temptation, I think, to be on one or two extremes, you know, where under the banner of mercy, you end up not really loving people because you end up enabling whatever the situation is or because you want to avoid conflict and what not.

[60 : 42] You don't address the situation, that kind of thing. And then there's the other extreme that you're highlighting now with regard to the dead religion. How would you, you know, advise with regard to...

Yeah, I think you've highlighted well, Faye, that there are two extremes and we want to avoid those extremes. Right. We want to try to make sure that we are helping those who we're supposed to be helping.

And as you said, it requires finding that balance. It requires wisdom. And I'll say this, you know, as a practice, I don't give money to people asking for it.

I will make the effort to get food if I'm able to do that. But I don't hold it as an absolute rule.

I remember maybe two months ago, I was at a shopping center parking lot and there was this woman with this little baby.

[61 : 48] She looked pretty malnourished. The baby was malnourished. But I know that people will borrow a baby to beg. They will do that. And so she asked me for money and I told her no.

Sorry, I didn't have any money. And I don't know what delayed me. Something delayed me in the parking lot. I saw it go over to some other people and they didn't help.

But then she was making her way back to me. And it's one of those rare occasions where I just felt, you know what, I'm just going to give her the money. And I did. And one of the things that came in my mind at that point was something I heard a dear friend of mine and this church many years ago, John Deal said, he said, when you help people, you should never be concerned about them abusing the help you give them.

He said, because we defraud the Lord all the time. He said, we abuse God's goodness all the time. He said, so you should never be so overly concerned about that. Now, it's not to contradict the point with Jen that you see the person with the bottle or on drugs, obviously, that you don't want to enable that.

But I think I would just say, be balanced and be open to even some rules that you may adopt that in the moment God may say to you to do otherwise.

[63 : 18] I don't know what she did with the money. And I think maybe, as I think back on it now, my heart was probably more for the baby, because she was saying it was to buy food for the baby.

And maybe that was the reason there. But you do it, you release it to the Lord and you trust the Lord to use it for good in their lives. All right, we have time for one more. No?

All right. Well, let's stand and sing our closing song.