

Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath

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[0 : 0 0] in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 2, page 838, and that are two well-known incidents of Jesus in his actions on what is called the Sabbath day, the day of rest, the one day in seven, and particularly verse 27 where Jesus says to the Pharisees, remember these legalistically minded people, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man, Jesus is Lord, even of the Sabbath.

And those of you who were here last Sunday evening, remember we were looking at this whole matter of legalism versus grace. We saw that last week in the confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus. On the one hand, these Pharisees, the result was to keep the law of God. Fine, of course, that's our aim to do surely, to keep God's law, to obey it.

But they were adding man-made rules so that they were protecting themselves from breaking the commands by adding man-made rules that had no authority from God. They were giving themselves an authority they didn't have.

They were making for themselves a pattern of conduct that was totally beyond the spirit of the law. What were they doing? They were denying the love of God. They were denying love to their fellow man.

They were denying the grace of God towards sinners. In their actions, there was nothing of the love of God, nothing of the grace of God. It was simply a works righteousness.

[1 : 5 2] You know, claiming by their efforts, claiming that keeping the law, they could be made right with God. And Jesus saying to them, yes, the law has to be obeyed. It is to be obeyed.

Sinner man, by his sin, can't keep the law perfectly. And the good news is that forgiveness is found through Jesus. Yes, when we as sinners break the law, and through grace, his grace, through unmerited favour of God, sinners are forgiven.

Sinners who know the Lord Jesus, the Saviour. Sinner. These Pharisees were revealing the kind of mindset that excludes love, that excludes grace, that excludes mercy.

A mindset that repels rather than attract somebody to the grace of God. It's a kind of attitude that, some of you know Thomas Guthrie, the old Scottish minister, the kind of attitude that Guthrie preached about when he actually reprimanded preachers who thundered out the terrors of the law, armed with bolts of vengeance and scowling down from pulpits.

That's unlike him who wept over Jerusalem. It's the him, of course, it's Jesus. Jesus, the friend of sinners. Jesus, the merciful one towards sinners.

[3 : 1 2] Jesus, full of grace and truth. And it's saying Jesus, when he's again confronted here with the venom of the Pharisees. Jesus, remember, we read of it in the whole matter of observing the law.

Jesus responds with grace. Grace rooted in the word of God, his word. Jesus showing the divine wisdom of God against the foolishness of man.

That's what we see here in these next two incidents that Mark tells us here, gives us here about the fourth commandment. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The two incidents that we read of the plucking of corn on the Sabbath day and Jesus healing a man with a withered hand on another Sabbath day.

Both incidents condemned by the Pharisees and, of course, justified by Jesus. Now, we read these passages. Of course, we need to know more of what it means to follow the Lord Jesus, to do as he wills, to do what God's word informs us.

So, we're going to look at these two incidents for our own application. To see the manner of Jesus' response, how he responded to his accusers, and what we can learn from Jesus' manner.

[4 : 31] And then, of course, to consider to our own observance of this one day in seven, this gift that God has given us. And then, thirdly, as we saw towards the end of that little section we read in chapter three, the madness, the madness of the opposition to Jesus, particularly concerning the Sabbath.

Well, first, let's look at the manner, the manner of Jesus' response to his accusers. This is Mark's gospel, remember. This is a very fast-paced gospel.

You know, Mark goes from one incident to another in a very, very quick, very fast-paced way. There's almost no time to breathe between one incident and another. And you certainly see that in the way that Mark records the conflict that Jesus is facing in his ministry, in his early ministry. We've already seen three successive challenges to his ministry. And then here's another two challenges, this time concerning the matter of the Sabbath. And Mark begins this two-part description of this Sabbath controversy.

And he tells us, as you see there in verse 23, he tells us of a particular Sabbath. It begins one Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples are walking through the grain fields in that area.

[5 : 54] The disciples are hungry, they pick up heads of grain and they rub them together. They take the grain and eat what they've ground down in their hands. And then the second incident, the man with the withered hand.

Jesus heals that man of his disability on the Sabbath day. And in both cases, Jesus is being watched.

He's being watched by the Pharisees. He's been watched to see if Jesus is going to break one of their many, many additional rules that they'd created to guard themselves against breaking the fourth commandment.

And the rules that, as one Jewish Christian author described, as a yoke which was truly unbearable. Let me give you some examples just to show how, we would say, how ridiculous these added-on rules were.

Or a donkey. A donkey could be ridden on the Sabbath day, provided it was saddled the day before. Another one. Women weren't allowed to wear jewellery on the Sabbath because if they took the jewellery off to show a friend, that jewellery would be deemed a burden.

[7 : 07] A burden that was forbidden to be carried on the Sabbath day. Another one. If you cut your finger on the Sabbath, you could put a piece of cloth in it to stop the bleeding.

But if you suspected that that was going to aid the healing process, well, that was considered a work and you're breaking the day. You'd almost say silly rules, do's and don'ts.

I think the most ridiculous one I saw was about a hen. If a hen was being fattened to be eaten, if a hen laid an egg, the egg could be eaten because laying an egg wasn't considered that particular hen's work.

But if the hen laid an egg on the Sabbath, the hen was deemed to be working and you couldn't eat that egg. Legalism gone mad. There was no effort.

There was no attempt to instruct the people about the spiritual purpose of the Sabbath. There wasn't any desire to seek a spiritual blessing through the keeping holy of the seventh day.

[8 : 14] So what we see already is law without love. And you may have to say ironically, it was law that, you know, was deemed something that if kept to the full would merit salvation.

You know, in other words, a work. And it was work, work that the Pharisees reckoned Jesus and the disciples were doing on both occasions that we read here in Mark.

And so let's take the first of these two incidents. Plucking the ears of grain on the Sabbath. Never mind that the disciples were hungry. Never mind that the law of Moses was silent about the whole matter of plucking grain on the Sabbath.

Never mind that there was actually scriptural precedent for what the disciples had done. The disciples said what the disciples had done was just the same as work.

And therefore breaking the fourth commandment, you shall do no work on the Sabbath. And then we read of the healing of this disabled man. And as we saw in the start of chapter 3, the Pharisees concluding that Jesus had worked on the Sabbath.

[9 : 20] And so in their estimation, guilty of breaking the law. Never mind that that man was in great need. Never mind that Jesus was performing an action of healing for that man's particular need at that time.

Never mind that God, that Jesus had done good to that suffering man. All the Pharisees could show by their attitude was a loveless, heartless, graceless response to the love and grace of the Lord Jesus.

Of course, Jesus was absolutely upholding the law to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself, even on that Sabbath day. So, what about Jesus' response to these Pharisees, to his accusers?

What about the manner of his response? Well, that's why we turned to 1 Samuel chapter 21, the Old Testament, where Jesus begins, as you see there in verse 25, 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? And Jesus gives that to telling of David and going into that, the tabernacle, and eating what was called the holy bread, the bread of the presence.

[10:41] And as Jesus says, which isn't lawful for any but the priests to eat and also give it to those who were with him. Jesus is saying, Have you never read? Well, of course they had read.

Jesus knew that these Pharisees had read every word of the Old Testament, every word of Scripture. These Pharisees knew their Bibles inside out. But they'd never read Scripture. They'd never read the Bible with open hearts through the mind of the Holy Spirit. They'd closed their minds. They'd closed their minds to the bigger picture of the Spirit of the law that didn't forbid things like taking corn on the Sabbath when that was for a particular need.

And you see Jesus teaching here, refuting the claims of his opponents. Jesus was using Scripture and using Scripture as a whole. Scripture interpreting Scripture.

Back in David's days, we read there in 1 Samuel 21, David and his men were in great need. They were hungry. They were desperately hungry. Now, the law of Moses, the law had said that no one but the priests could eat that particular bread in the tabernacle.

[11:54] But David asked for that bread because the need of his men was hunger. Their need ensured that the bread was eaten, no sin committed.

They hadn't broken the fourth commandment. It was a work of necessity. And Jesus brings that whole aspect of necessity into his argument about his disciples and their needs on the Sabbath. So when Jesus' own disciples, when they're in need, they don't need sin and eating the grain on the Sabbath. Jesus using Scripture to reveal the whole emptiness of the Pharisees and their condemning.

But Jesus, of course, still upholding the law faithfully and sinlessly. You see that in the second incident, start of chapter 3. Again, look at the whole matter of necessity, need.

what was needed. This time, start of chapter 3, it's a public action that Jesus does. Before, we would say more a private action.

[12:58] But here's a public action. The first incident in the grain fields is away from the public. The second is full of the people out there in that synagogue and a very well-attended synagogue it would be.

But the Pharisees are there and they're watching to trap Jesus. They've got no concern for the poor man. They've got no concern for his welfare. All they're doing is seeking an opportunity to trap Jesus and to do it by their own crooked interpretation of the law that was given for man's good. Notice Jesus' response. He's not going to be intimidated by these fault finders. just as before. Jesus is going to do what he does to glorify God.

He's going to bless that disabled man through healing and he's going to keep the law. Now, what does all this show for our own application? Well, look firstly at the manner of Jesus' response.

His response to his accusers. He wasn't intimidated. What does he do? He directs his opponents where? To Scripture. Because Jesus has that utter confidence in God's Word.

[14:14] The Word, as he brings forth the Word of God, used to refute the Pharisees. And of course, the Pharisees were silent. They couldn't respond because Jesus was showing them the truth of Scripture.

In fact, you notice in the second instance that the Pharisees again are silent when Jesus confronts them. Whether it's about David and the show bread, the holy bread, or when Jesus asks in verse 4, chapter 3, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill, the Pharisees are silent.

You, you have the infallible Word of God as your guide. When you're faced with the kind of attitude of the Pharisees, when you're faced with the opposition of people who you're going to try and

undermine your Christian character, when you stand for truth based in God's Word, turn to God's Word.

It is your guide in all matters of living for God and all matters of holiness and your service and you're honouring God and you're honouring Him by your life. What does our catechism tell us?

Well, second question rather, what standard, what rule has God given to direct us how we might glorify and enjoy Him? And the answer, of course, the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament is the only rule, the only standard to direct us how we might glorify and enjoy Him.

[15:49] So we turn to Scripture, God's Word. We're confronted by any opposition to your stance as a Christian based in His Word. But notice certainly the manner of Jesus' response, particularly when He's healing that man or about to heal that man with the withered hand.

Notice His response there. The middle of chapter 3 there, He's angry. Jesus has a righteous anger. He's angry at the hardness of the hearts of His accusers.

In fact, He's grieved. He's grieved because that hardness isn't being softened by grace. Jesus has a godly sorrow, that sorrow at the lack of love for the disabled man.

Jesus showing that He truly is, showing that godly sorrow. He's the man of sorrows. And, you know, surely that has to be our response to hard-hearted legalism, a godly sorrow, a sorrow, you know, that there is still around us, that hard-hearted coldness.

You know, when law without love is promoted and the grace of the Lord Jesus rejected. But that, of course, leaves the question, how do we observe this one day in seven, this day that God has given to us as a gift?

[17:16] What's the matter of our observing this day? Well, as we've seen with Jesus, we do it ourselves. We turn to Scripture for our guidance.

As we saw in verse 27 there at the end of chapter 2, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

And then, as we saw in verse 4, is it lawful in the Sabbath to do good, to do harm, to save life, or to kill? Let's put these two together. Let's think of this whole aspect of the Sabbath.

Of course, it was given by God at creation, the seventh day when God rested. You read in Genesis chapter 2, verse 2, that God made that day holy. In other words, God set apart that day.

And later, of course, when God gave the law to Moses, fourth commandment, remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, to keep it separate for God. As God rested from his work on that first Sabbath, God has set us an example, as a pattern of our conduct, our behaviour, in terms of rest, keeping one day and seven apart for God.

[18:33] Of course, with Jesus rising on the first day of the week, and our Sunday, right, the pattern remains. Think of Jesus and his death and resurrection. He's brought in a new creation in him.

So we still keep this one day and seven as the new creation of God. And as you go through the account here of Jesus as in the Sabbath, I think we see principles, principles of conduct, of behaviour, as to how you and how I should observe this one day and seven, the Christian Sabbath. Because remember, the Sabbath that God created, this one day and seven that God created is for man's benefit, it's for man's blessing, man's physical need and man's spiritual need.

So we say this, we say God rested on that day in his work of creation. That's an example for man to follow. That we have this one day of rest for our good, for our restoration.

You know, after a week of work, there's one day and seven and we give thanks to God for this one day and seven. And look at this, so we're looking at this whole aspect of need and that shows us that truly the Sabbath was made for man.

[19:50] The Sabbath given to man, God's gift to man, God's gift to meet our needs. This gift, this special blessing of rest, it wasn't given to restrict our life.

It wasn't some kind of killjoy that God had given to man, you know, for man to suffer some kind of, you know, killjoy restrictions on this day. No. The day that God gave for man is a day a day of blessing, a gift, a gift to be enjoyed, to know God's blessing, a day to rest in, to come together. As we read in the New Testament, the early church met together on the first day of the week. They worshipped the Lord of the Sabbath on the first day of the week. And you know, it's very striking the way that Jesus teaches this truth.

The Sabbath was made for man. The word is created. The Sabbath was created for man. Because God knows who we are. He knows who we are. He knows we're dust. He knows our frame. He knows our needs. This one day in heaven meets these needs if we would just use the day wisely in rest and worship.

[21 : 02] Physical rest and resting in the Lord. Resting in the Lord through times such as this, this day itself. And this opportunity we have to rest in Him through this act of worship.

God didn't create human beings in order to keep the Sabbath. No, man wasn't made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man for His benefit, for our benefit.

So here's Jesus telling us, telling us that He's Lord of the Sabbath. In other words, He's saying it's His right, it's His authority as the Son of Man, the Son of God. It's His right to teach us how we ought to spend this day.

He's divine, equal with God. He's the Son of God. The world was made through Him. He instituted the Sabbath and all the associated blessing that this day gives us.

So if the Sabbath was made for man, then it has to follow. It's a day of blessing. Blessing that gives support, that gives relief, that gives joy.

[22 : 08] You go to another part of the Old Testament, you go to the book of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 58 verse 13, and God calls on Israel to see the Sabbath as a delight, a day of joy.

True joy, not a day for self-pleasure, but a day of true joy. You know, too often that the myth is, you know, sort of pushed forward, that this day is one day and seven is anything but a delight.

You know, people say, oh, this is just a day of restriction, you know, a day of restricting your freedom. But this is a day of blessing. And if it's a day of blessing, then it's a day that God has gifted to you, a day to be used for his glory, a day for our good and his glory, this day of rest.

And we're better, we're better to spend certainly part of this day of rest than worshipping him in this act of corporate worship. You know, resting in the Lord, resting in this place that God has called us to, to come to him and pray, to come to him and worship and to do that which is lawful, to do what is good.

That's what Jesus was saying to the accusers there in the synagogue. You know, the question Jesus gave them about the Sabbath, as we notice there, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?

[23 : 39] That question that they couldn't answer. If they answered it, they were going to condemn themselves because they would show that they had lack of pity to that man. And so it's for you and for me to take heed of Jesus' question.

You know, when we think that he has given us his authority to do good on the Lord's day, is it lawful to do good? Yes, it is lawful to do good.

Is it lawful to save lives? Yes, it is lawful to save lives. It's honouring to God. God has gifted us this one day in seven to do things that are merciful and necessary.

Just as Jesus healed that man with a withered hand, that was an act of mercy, a necessity.

Whether it's in the home, or whether it's in places where a Christian will work on this day, then that necessary work is to the glory of God.

That work, these works of mercy, works of necessity. None of us have any right to condemn these actions. And I would say it would go so far as to say this.

[24 : 48] We won't know a blessing on this day when we treat it in a kind of legalistic manner that's more intent to squeeze the life out of the day through our sort of cold, loveless Sabbatarianism.

The kind of attitude that's got more to do with the mind of the Pharisees than it has to do with the heart of Jesus. So, you know, the question has to be asked, do you treat this day as a delight?

Do you treat this day as this one day in seven, this day that God has gifted you, this day of rest, this day for worship? Do you rejoice in this day? This day as a day to save lives, even lives saved through the preaching of the word, through the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit, through the healing power of the gospel.

Well, if you rejoice in this day, if you know that this is a day that the Lord has given us, that this is a day to be spent in his word and in his place of worship, glorifying him in this day of rest, you're going to face opposition.

You're going to face the madness of opposition. You see there in verse 6 there, chapter 3, Jesus faced the madness of opposition. The healing of that disabled man on the Sabbath was a moment when two of the most unlikely allies, the most unlikely friends got together to condemn

Jesus. The Pharisees and the Herodians.

[26 : 17] And we're told that they decided to get rid of Jesus. They decided to destroy him. The Pharisees, these religious fundamentalists. And then the Herodians, a secular party, they supported the Herods, the King Herods of the day. This combination of religious and political opportunism to get rid of Jesus.

And you know that kind of combination well it's still with us today. It's not very far away. Particularly when God's word, when God's truth and God's law is upheld.

Whether it be the one day in seven or Christian Sabbath or any other aspect of God's law. Those of you will know of course that happened very recently in Lewis and Stornow, the opening of Unlater and Stornow on the Sunday to show films in the name of freedom.

What did we see? We saw, yes, we saw church and secular groups getting together to applaud the opening and condemn the attitude of others. As some of you know, remember when your money was made it very public, there was refusal to play for Scotland on the Sunday.

I remember reading in the press the amount of abuse that Ewan got for his stance. It really was quite astonishing. A madness. A madness that of course as we said seemed not just in regard to the fourth commandment but to every other of the commands of God.

[27 : 49] Well, let's not digress there but you know, if you love the Lord, if you love his word, if you love his law, if you seek to honour God through keeping and loving his law, well, we don't do it through a co-legalism but we do it through joy.

The joy of the Lord, the joy of the gift that God has blessed you with even in this day. And if you do that, yes, you will face opposition. You'll face opposition from those who can't understand why your children won't go to the match on Sunday.

You'll face opposition from those who won't understand why your children won't go to the party on Sunday. Why they and why you may go to church on Sunday. That opposition, well, that opposition might well be strong opposition.

Yes, you will face the madness of a world that denies God, a world that denies his blessings, a world that denies the gifts that God has given to his people.

Even this one day in seven, this day that God has given to man. But you know, when you do face that opposition, still stay strong in the Lord. As Jesus says, he's the Lord of the Sabbath.

[29 : 03] So make this day a delight. Give thanks to God for this day. Give thanks for this one day in seven. This one day in seven that points to that eternal Sabbath in glory.

That eternal rest. When you'll know that blessing, that eternal blessing of resting in the Lord. When you'll know that endless praise, that praise of him for his goodness to you.

And you'll be praising him in that eternal Sabbath. You'll praise him for his mercy towards you. He saw you in great need. And he performed that great work of necessity in bringing salvation to you. You who needed that more than anything else. We'll pray that, yes, that God will bless even the remainder of this day. He'll give thanks to him for this special day.

This day that Jesus claimed authority over. The day that Jesus rose from the dead. The day that all believers, the day that the new creation worships God and worships God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 12] This day that God's people worship him and will do so until the Lord Jesus returns. Amen. Let us pray. Lord our God, we truly do indeed give thanks for this day.

this day that you have gifted to us. This day of rest. Oh Lord, forgive us for the many times when we have not used this day as you have intended us to use it.

Forgive us, Lord, for the many times when we truly have sought self-pleasure above giving glory to you. Oh Lord, help us to honour you, to honour this day as you have given it to us so to do.

Bless those who perform works of mercy and necessity on this day. Bless even now, Lord, those, even your own people who are working in different occupations on this day out of necessity, out of mercy, those in hospitals, those elsewhere where the need is great for such work.

Bless parents at home who perform the many actions in looking after children. Lord, we thank you that you give us this day to glorify you in.

[31 : 23] So help us, Lord, we pray. Bless us. Bless the word proclaim, forgive anything that's been said or missed from this pulpit this evening. We pray, Lord, these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, we sang Psalm 92 at the start of the service. We're going to sing it again, this time from the older version on page 353.

Page 353, this psalmist we said is particularly referred to as the psalm for the Sabbath day. We'll sing from verse 12 to the end of the psalm.

The tune is Arlington. The light, the palm tree flourishing shall be the righteous one. He shall light to the cedar grow that is in Lebanon. 12 to 15, Psalm 92 to God's praise.

verse 13 to God's praise. This is the psalmist and the psalmist will hang by under the short of the earth. Let's put the to the psalmist on the whole of the fish and the casino on the 25th and the one on the sequel and put the husband down to hatch.

[32 : 36] Are you going to put the st ■■? Exactly. Are you going to Simpson