

Lord of the Sabbath

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. Glad you have joined us this morning. I'm going to begin this morning by reading our passage that we're going to be looking at. This isn't my normal practice, but we're going to start with the Word of God this morning.

And we're going to be looking at Mark chapter 2, starting in verse 23. That's starting on page 786 in your pew Bible. And why don't we turn there, and before we go to read God's Word, let me pray and ask for God's help.

So, let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we come to you now. And Lord, we ask that you would, Lord, allow your Word to dwell in us.

Lord, that as we look at this passage together, Lord, that you would be teaching us about who you are. Lord, lay bare the realities of our hearts and the need that we have for your gospel, and most of all, for our Savior Jesus.

Lord, I pray for your help this morning that you would give me, Lord, words that you would have me speak. And Lord, that together we would sit under your Word. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name.

[1 : 1 8] Amen. Mark chapter 3, starting in verse 23. One Sabbath, he, that is Jesus, 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 is not lawful for the bread... I'm sorry.

And ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him? And he said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. And again, he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand, and they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

[2 : 3 2] 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. So if you are a good literary reader, you're reading this story, and when you come to verses 5 and 6 of chapter 3, it should be shocking.

Let me read them again to you, just so you can hear this. And Jesus said to the man, Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. And the Pharisees went out, immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him.

How to destroy him. How do you get there? How is it that a man being healed causes the heart to want to destroy the one who did the healing?

[3 : 5 1] This is the question that I think we want to look at. As we think about this story this morning, these accounts, there are two stories that I think Mark put together for a purpose.

How do you get to a place where you want to hate a man and kill him for healing someone else? These stories focus on the Sabbath, and their understanding of the Sabbath.

And so we're going to spend some time looking at the Sabbath and what it is broadly in the Bible, and then we're going to look at how the Sabbath was an issue in these passages, and then we're going to look at how Jesus responded to those issues.

So if you're taking your outline, there it is. The Sabbath broadly in the Bible, and then the Sabbath problem in the passage, and how Jesus responded is his third. So let's look at this together for a few minutes.

What do you think the Sabbath means? Maybe you grew up, like I did, reading Little House in the Prairie, and Little House in the Big Woods. You may remember, Laura Ingalls Wilder records this in The Little House in the Big Woods.

[4 : 59] On Sundays, Mary and Laura must not run, or shout, or be noisy in their play. Mary could not sew on her nine-patch quilt, and Laura could not knit on the tiny mittens she was making for baby Carrie.

They might look quietly at their paper dolls, but they must not make anything new for them. They were not allowed to sew on doll clothes, even with pins.

They must sit quietly while Ma and Pa read Bible stories to them. And then a little further on, one Sunday after supper, Laura could not bear it any longer.

She began to play with Jack. That's their dog. And in a few minutes, she was running and shouting. Pa told her to sit in her chair and be quiet. But when Laura sat down, she began to cry and kick the chair with her heels.

I hate Sundays, she said. So maybe this is the view of Sabbath. If you've ever grown up in a church, or you've thought about it, you've read about this, you've seen it in movies, this may be the picture of Sabbath that you think of, something that's severe, without laughter, without joy.

[6 : 04] It's a stereotype of a stiff, uncomfortable day, with a set of rules that most of us would chafe under, and that we would rather not do. But that's not really what the Sabbath is biblically.

So let's look at it biblically for a few minutes, broadly, to think about what it is, right? So the Sabbath was established in creation, and then clarified in the law that Sarah read earlier in the giving of the Ten Commandments, right?

So, and the fourth commandment, for in the six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, and the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.

God in his creative work set apart one day out of seven, where he did not work. He worked six, and then on the seventh day he rested. And so, God commanded his people to follow this pattern in order to show this creative pattern that God had done.

But it's not just in this creative pattern that God rooted this idea of the Sabbath, but in Deuteronomy, in the second telling of, the second explanation of the Ten Commandments, he says, you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

[7 : 34] Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. So it was grounded in creation, but then it was also grounded in God's creative work, that they were slaves who had to work seven days, and then as God rescued them, he said, restore yourself to this creation pattern.

I'm restoring you into a place where there is rest as a part of your work, because I'm redeeming you into a place of rest. And God said the Sabbath is so important.

It is one of the key signs, along with circumcision, of being a part of the nation of Israel. So in Exodus 31, 16 and 17, Moses writes, therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a covenant forever.

It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

These are God's words to his people through Moses. And again, just as I was saying, this is one of the most important things in the Old Testament to say this is what it means to be part of my people, is to observe this rite of six days to work and then seventh day a rest.

[8 : 56] Okay? Now, the people of Israel didn't always follow this. You can read through the story of the prophets to see where they failed and where they succeeded in doing this. Fast forward to the New Testament.

And in the New Testament, the Jewish setting of this was the Pharisees. And the Pharisees, who were a small sect of Judaism but had a lot of influence more broadly in culture, and they had a particular love for God's law and the Torah and a desire, a zeal even, to obey it.

But their zeal, as Jesus pointed out, missed the mark because they loved the letter of the law and missed the heart of the law. So Jesus in Matthew 23 says, that you tithe mint and cumin, but neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

The Pharisees had this pattern of building a hedge around the law. That is, they put on extra regulations so that you couldn't get even close to breaking one of the laws of the Old Testament. So when they kept the Sabbath, they built all of these extra rules to make sure that you didn't even come close to working on the Sabbath. Fascinating.

[10:14] I looked up the website, the Orthodox Union website. You can look it up today. There are 39 categories that were established in the first century that still are practiced in Orthodox Judaism.

39 categories of things you must not do in order to observe the Sabbath and to not work. The first one is you may not carry anything. This comes from Jeremiah 17, if you're interested in looking it up more.

You may not carry anything outside of your home. Okay? That's fairly straightforward, but this means things like you can't carry firewood out of your home into your home to light a fire.

You also can't light a fire, but that's a different thing. That's why you can't turn on light switches. But they built all these other rules about this. Not only could you not carry things outside, but even they said, well, to make sure that we're really honoring this, you also can't carry things inside your home that aren't necessary.

So things like small rocks. Not sure why you'd carry rocks in your home, but that was on the list. Also pencils. You can't use a pencil. Because using a pencil means to carry it, and that's doing work.

[11:23] You can't carry candles. You can't carry money. There are all these things. Even when you go to synagogue, you can't carry your keychain. You can't carry your wallet. You can't carry a purse. These are the ways that they make this hedge around this don't do work on the Sabbath in an honest desire to honor God in it.

So this was the context of first century Phariseeism in the way that they practiced the Sabbath. Now I'm going to fast forward just a little bit.

And what about the church? What did the early church do? Well, many early Christians were Jewish by background. So some of them observed the Sabbath as an ongoing part of their tradition. But, and this is not the point of the sermon, but I'm just going to say it because we might as well deal with it. But I don't believe that Christians are obligated to keep the Sabbath in the Old Testament way.

Not because there isn't good wisdom in keeping the Sabbath in the sense of setting it apart from other days and setting it apart as a day of rest. There is wisdom in having a rhythm of work and rest.

[12:37] It is good for human beings and it's good for us to flourish with that. What the early church did is the early church, rather than following the Sabbath on a Saturday, they said, we're going to worship and gather on Sunday morning.

So they moved from the Sabbath to the Lord's Day. And on the Lord's Day, they gathered because it was the day of resurrection, the first day of the week in the first century. They gathered together for fellowship and worship.

They gathered to say, rather than doing our regular work that day, we're going to gather specially to be with God's people for fellowship and for prayer and for encouragement. And that's what they did. And there are lots of ways to celebrate the Lord and the Lord's Day that honor God, but not in the spirit of the Pharisees. But in the spirit of freedom, that we do this because this is a wise thing, not because it is a required thing.

So Colossians 2, 16 says, therefore let no one pass judgment on you in the question of food or drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. Romans 14, 15 says, one person esteems one day is better than another, while another esteems all days alike.

[13:46] Each should be fully convinced in his own mind. Again, I don't want to pick a battle. If you want to come talk to me after it, this is great. This will be a good conversation.

But I want you to hear, this is broadly how we would understand at Trinity the issue of how Christians should or should not follow the Sabbath.

But having looked at this biblically, broadly, right, we recognize that God gave the Sabbath as a day of rest, as a day to honor him, as a day to set aside from the busyness of our week, to focus on him

in special ways.

And that was true in the Old Testament. And as we practice it today in the Lord's Day sense, there's still good value in this. And it was meant to be a blessing. But so easily, what is meant to be a blessing in God's economy can be twisted.

And this is what happens as we look at this passage. So let's look at the passage together and think about how it is in this passage that we encounter the Sabbath. Right?

[14:50] So if you go back to starting in verse 23, right, this Sabbath creates a conflict in both sides of the parts of the story. In the first story, we see Jesus and his disciples are walking along the road or through the fields, and there's grain, and they're just picking grain and, you know, shelling it and eating it.

That's what they're doing. And the Pharisees come and they say, wait a minute. You're not a serious Jew. You're not serious about following God. The Pharisees come and they say, I don't know who you think you are, but you are not, you can't claim this role of being a religious leader if you are going to so blatantly break rules of the Sabbath.

Right? Because harvesting would be one of those works that would be forbidden on the Sabbath. And what they were doing in the mind of the Pharisees was harvesting. And so they looked at him and his disciples and they judged and condemned by this question.

Right? Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? So the Jewish Pharisees had this perspective and Jesus is leading his disciples to do something very different.

And this then becomes accelerated in the next story, this conflict that's happening, where in chapter 3, verse 1, Jesus goes into the synagogue.

[16:18] There's a man with a withered hand. And it seems very clear that somehow this was a setup. Verse 2, they watched Jesus. It's like they set the man up and they're like, okay, let's see what he's going to do.

And they didn't just watch him, but they watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him. They were not curious to see, hey, I wonder what Jesus is going to do here.

Is he going to do something good? Like, let's find out. They already had in their hearts a desire to accuse him because of what he's already done, the way that he's already showing himself to not be submitting to the religious worldview of the Pharisees.

they had the spirit not of, maybe we have something to learn from Jesus. They had the spirit of, let's see if we can catch him. Verse 5 describes Jesus as seeing their hardness of hearts, which is remarkable, right?

Because Jesus is coming and the people who are broken and needy, the sinners and the sufferers, they're flocking to Jesus for help. But the religious people are sitting back watching him, seeing if they're going to follow, play by their rules and are growing in their heart, a heart of condemnation and judgment for his actions in the world.

[17:45] It even led to an unholy alliance. The Pharisees went out and they met with the Herodians who were their enemies religiously. The Herodians would compromise in all sorts of places where the Pharisees wouldn't, but they came together because they saw, they shared with them this hatred of Jesus because Jesus was upsetting their system and their understanding and their power.

Ultimately, he was upsetting their commitment to their religious life in such a way that they would do even, even seek to destroy him.

So before we go on, let's just stop for a minute. What about us? Can our hearts be so twisted? Are we too committed to religious righteousness in such a way that we end up actually rejecting Jesus along the way?

Now look, we need to be clear here. As Christians, there is a proper obedience to God's word. God's word does speak clearly and we need to think about what it says and we do need to seek to obey it and we're not shrinking back from submitting to God and his word.

But the Pharisees do something more and something different than that. Here's how I want to explain it to help us see how easily it is that our hearts do what the Pharisees do.

[19:12] Even the best spiritual practices can go wrong. If you're a Christian here, you may have how to have a quiet time, how to pray, how to disciple others. We may have a discussion about things like what kind of music do we play in our church service.

We might have a discussion about what you should wear to church. There are questions about how do we act in the world, right? In the old-fashioned church in days gone by, we talk about don't drink, you don't chew, you don't go with girls that do.

Do you guys know that? It's a silly little phrase, but it's this sense of this is how we protect ourselves, right? This is the spirit of the movie Footloose, right?

We can't have dances because sexual immorality might break out. And we need to think carefully about this spirit that can so infuse the church where we end up judging one another based on these rules that go beyond what the Bible actually says, right?

And look, in its heart, there's a desire for us to avoid sin that is good, but it can become a platform for self-righteousness.

[20 : 27] When our zeal to do what is right and to follow God, even when it leads us to counter-cultural and sacrificial changes in our lifestyle, when we do that, that can be a glorious thing to God's, that honors God.

But it so easily becomes something that we then turn and heap on others as a burden, right? And so we start doing this and then in our zeal we become self-righteous and then we look down on other people who don't do the same thing we do, right?

And I honestly think as I look at my own life and times when I have done this in the past, it has been done often out of fear. Well, if I'm going to obey the Sabbath in this particular way, if I'm going to keep the Sabbath in this particular way, then I want everyone else to do it as well because I feel weak and if everyone else is doing something else, then I might feel left out and I don't want to feel left out.

So I'm going to impose this religious rule in order to be accepted. Or sometimes we just do it to say, look at me, look at how righteous I'm being. I'm more serious, more zealous than you are.

And how easily this becomes not only a self-justifying spirit in our own hearts, but a spirit of condemnation for everyone else who doesn't do what we do.

[21 : 50] Now look, in the church today, broadly, in the Bible-following churches in the world, we've often, I think we've swung further away from this legalistic judgmentalism, but I wonder if we've replaced it with other things.

Friends, we need to be just as careful with our political alliances, our views on social issues, our understanding of how to navigate some of these things as we have in the past on what music you listen to or how long your skirt can be.

We need to recognize that the way that we carry these attitudes can have the same spirit whether we come to conclusions out of honest desire to honor the Lord, but when we heap them on others and require others to agree with us, to do as we do, and judge others when they don't follow with us, then we are in the same spirit as the Pharisees.

We need to recognize that. And what does Jesus say? What does Jesus say to us and to the Pharisees in response to these challenges to his disobedience of the Sabbath law?

Jesus says, I am the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus does not shrink back from this, but he actually goes into it.

[23 : 20] In the story of the man with the withered hand, Jesus takes it on. He walks into the synagogue. He sees the withered hand. He sees the people watching. He knows what they're thinking.

He looks at the man and he says, come here. He makes a spectacle out of him. Can you imagine this man with the withered hand? He probably spent his whole life wanting to hide. He's like, I don't want to go up front. I don't want to be...

Jesus says, come here. And he's looking at the Pharisees and he's like, okay, you want to see what I'm going to do? I'm going to show you exactly what I'm going to do and I'm going to make a spectacle of it in order for you to know exactly what I think about this.

Is it right that on the Sabbath I would not do good? I would not heal? In the law in the first century, that's exactly how they understood it.

If you were injured but you could make it through the Sabbath, then you couldn't do anything about it. Now, if you were really, really life-threatening, you could do something to try to keep, get them to stable, right?

[24 : 23] But if you had a broken bone, you couldn't set it until the end of the Sabbath. Jesus is looking at them and saying, really? Is that what the Sabbath is for? Jesus confronts them and he says, there is something new here, better than this system of religious rules.

It's echoing what Nick preached on last week, what he said about fasting. The king is here. Something new is happening. Pay attention and be ready to follow because this is what he's saying in the end of chapter 2.

This is what he's saying when they challenged the disciples about not eating food on the Sabbath, right? If you look back in verse 25 of chapter 2, have you never read what David did, right?

What is he saying, right? He's challenging their understanding of the Sabbath by quoting this Old Testament story. And in case some of you are paying attention, if you go back to 1 Samuel 21 where this story happens, it's not Abiathar who is the priest at the moment.

His name is Ahimelech, right? And most Bible scholars understand that in the days of Abiathar, you even look in the ESV notes, it says in the passage about, right?

[25 : 45] And most people think that in referring to this story in the Old Testament, it'd say, oh, well, this is the story about Abiathar the priest because he's the most prominent one in that section of 1 Samuel.

So, just in case you're wondering, that's why it refers to him. But he refers back and he says, don't you know that David did this too? David and his men were running for their lives and they were hungry and they came across the priest outside the synagogue or the tabernacle, sorry, it was outside the tabernacle and they said, hey, we're hungry, give us something to eat.

And he said, well, all we have is the food inside that's on the altar that's set apart for the priest. And David said, bring it to me.

And the priest went in and he brought it out and he shared the food and he blessed it. Now, some people might have said that what Jesus is saying is the need is so great, the law doesn't matter. Right? The need is so great, the law doesn't matter. And that's a reasonable explanation because Jesus clearly is seeing a need. But his disciples weren't starving here. It doesn't seem to make sense that that's actually his point.

[26 : 57] It seems that the point that Jesus is making is more of a correspondence. David, who was the anointed one, who was the one who would be the king of Israel, was claiming an authority in that place.

And Jesus is now coming and saying, I have greater authority than David. And I have the right to say, it is good and right for my disciples to eat on the Sabbath in this way.

Just like David did in the old way. Right? Jesus is saying, the new thing has come. The new one is here. I am the Lord of the Sabbath.

Right? And he's saying, look, the principle is that the Sabbath has always been by God for mankind. Right? Not so, so, we see the, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Right? And he's trying to say there that, that the principle ultimately is that this was something given for humanity, not for humanity to fit into.

[28 : 05] Right? But more than that, it's the last part of that where he says, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Even of this thing that is so critical to being a part of God's people.

Even over the thing that along with circumcision is the greatest sign of being a faithful Jew. Jesus is saying, I am the Lord even of that. And I'm gonna change what that looks like.

I'm gonna bring something greater than the Old Testament understanding of the Sabbath. Because I've brought, come to bring a kingdom that is better than the law.

What does he mean by this? Well, friends, we, we look, if you wanna turn with me, you can, but in Hebrews chapter 3 and 4, we see the final goal of what Jesus is doing here.

Because what Jesus is saying is, now that I am here, the Sabbath, as it's been practiced, was meant to be a sign pointing to something else. Right? Hebrews chapter 4, verse 9, says this, So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

[29 : 18] For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. What does this mean?

Well, what the writer of Hebrews, in a complex argument that I'm not gonna try to reproduce at 10 after 10 this morning, is a complex, he's saying, Jesus has come to fulfill all of these threads of the Old Testament.

And here, Jesus is, is presented as the one who's the fulfillment of the Sabbath. So that by faith in Jesus, there is a salvation that brings rest from the works of the law and works of righteousness that were seen to be the basis of how one might be acceptable to God.

Right? Fundamentally, he's saying, the Old Testament understanding, faulty in many ways, of faith was, you will be acceptable if you keep the law.

And Jesus has come and said, no, there's something better than that. I'm going to be the law keeper for you so that I might give to you instead an obedience and a rest from trying to justify yourselves.

[30 : 34] Right? We so often want to be justified before God because we have done something right. And the rest that Jesus offers is the rest that says, you will never be good enough and you will never be faithful enough and you will never work hard enough to please God and to overcome your sin.

But Jesus comes in his perfect work and as a substitute for us, lives that perfect life and he says, now by faith in me, you can rest from your work of righteousness because instead of working for it, I'm going to bestow it upon you when you come to me in faith.

And because I bestow it on you, then you can rest. You can rest in God's acceptance. You can rest in God's love. You can rest that you are a child in God's kingdom.

And this is what Jesus is saying when he says, I am the Lord of the Sabbath. So we rest from our works and we rest from the fear that we'll never be good enough.

We rest from the hamster wheel of religious activity in trying to prove that we're worthy. And we're free. We're free to worship.

[31 : 48] We're free to serve God. We're free to pursue him with sacrificial zeal in whatever that looks like for each of us in our lives. But we do it not to achieve God's favor, but out of the wonderful rest, the Sabbath rest that we have in Jesus.

So this is the invitation to see the Sabbath ultimately as a sign pointing ahead to Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus says to us today, come to me. Come to me if you are weary of your religious works. If you're weary of trying to be good enough.

If you're weary of somehow seeking to earn God. Come to me and find rest. Rest from your righteous self-righteous works from your self-justifying heart.

Come and find freedom from the tyranny of religious performance. And come to me and find joy. Joy in the Lord of the Sabbath who has given us rest in him.

[32 : 54] Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the rest that we do have in you.

And we thank you that this is what the Sabbath is for. Lord, that we might find ultimately in you our Sabbath rest. Rest from works of righteousness.

Rest from works of obedience. Lord, rest from all these things so that we might be still and know that you are God.

to know your salvation bestowed upon us by faith. Oh Lord, be with us we pray this morning. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.