

Mark 2:23-28

*What Kind of Sabbath Lord Do You Worship?*

It was a no-win situation as far as the man was concerned. He had been given a job by his boss that he felt certain would end in failure. The boss had pulled him aside the previous day and told him he was now in charge of the third largest account the company ran. It carried an operating budget of around a million dollars. And the boss simply said, you're in charge. But the man was crippled with fear. He was going to fail. And when he did, he knew what kind of cut throat boss he had. He was a hard man with demanding expectations. So, he did nothing. He made sure not to spend a dime (or in his mind, lose a dime). That way he could simply turn it back over, no harm done.

If any of this is sounding familiar, it's because it's just a modern retelling of one of Jesus' parables. The parable of the talents. Where a master gives three servants a portion of his sizable wealth and tells them to manage it while he's gone. While the first two faithfully carry out the master's wishes, the third one is crippled with fear and does nothing, burying the money until the master returns.

Now, that parable is not our focus for this morning. But I bring it up because I want to start our meditation on Mark 2 with one important point from it. The difference between the first two servants and the last one was how they viewed their master. The first two servants saw him as generous and giving, while the third described him as a hard man who reaped where he didn't plant and gathered where he did not scatter seed. A demanding master. A cruel master. One whose only interested in those below him for what he get from them. Two very different views of the master!

This morning Jesus reminds us that he is Lord, Lord of the Sabbath. As we consider what that means and as we try to understand what he's teaching us, that same distinction becomes key. What kind of Sabbath Lord do you worship? Do you view your God as lord in the sense that he is a demanding master who's mostly interested in what he can get from you or do you view him as the LORD, the gracious and compassionate God whose chiefly interested in blessing and giving?

Let's see how Jesus encourages us to worship him as LORD in the words from Mark 2.

The confrontation Mark records between Jesus and the Pharisees began when Jesus and his disciples were **passing through the grain fields** on a Sabbath day. As they went along, the **disciples began to pick heads of grain**, presumably rolling the plant through their fingers until they were left with the kernels and then popping them in their mouth. The Pharisees, always interested in finding some accusation to

level against Jesus, saw this and said, **“Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”**

Now the issue at hand was not that the disciples were stealing. God had made specific provisions in his law for farmers to leave the edges of their fields unharvested for the poor and those in need. So this wasn't stealing. What they Pharisees were accusing the disciples of doing was working. They were accusing them of harvesting on the Sabbath.

Let's stop to remember what the Sabbath day was all about. Sabbath is a word that simply means “rest”. It was a day of rest God had commanded. Just as we heard earlier from Deuteronomy. God commanded his people, work for 6 days (Sunday through Friday) and then take a day of rest. God knew what was good for his people. He knew that human bodies need time to rest. So he built it into his covenant. And as Moses also reminded the people, this was a Sabbath rest **to the LORD your God**. Not only did it give their bodies rest, but in setting aside the focus on physical work for a day, it gave the opportunity for spiritual contemplation. To praise God. To remember his goodness. To dedicate a day to him.

So this was God's command: do no work. So what is work? I know I'm not supposed to hitch up the plowing equipment to my oxen, but what else can't I do? So the rabbis through history started coming up with very specific explanations of what was and wasn't allowable...what was and what wasn't considered work. They prescribed the number of steps one could take on the Sabbath (about 2/3 of a mile) before your journey was considered “work”. They prescribed the size of items you could carry out of your house if it was on fire on a Sabbath before the items were so large that they constituted “work”.

This kind of minute calculating is what led the Pharisees to charge the disciples with breaking the Sabbath laws. They were “working”! They were harvesting on the Sabbath.

Now I could envision Jesus answering this charge in a very different way. You see, God had built exemptions into the Sabbath law. If your oxen falls in a hole on the Sabbath, you could work to get it out so it didn't die. If your neighbor needed help, you could do so. The point was God caring for others and yourself were not to be considered violations of the Sabbath. So I could envision Jesus answering, “haven't you read what Moses wrote? If your ox falls in a hole...etc. My disciples are simply caring for the basic needs of their lives. They've broken no laws.” I could envision Jesus answering like that.

But he didn't. And here's why. Because it wasn't just that the Pharisees failed to understand the exemptions God gave. It was that they failed to understand the very command itself. They had turned rest into a work! They had turned what was

meant to be a blessing from a gracious and loving God, into a demand to be met from a demanding, exacting, cruel master. They saw the Lord as a God whose chief concern was that his people were measuring up and THAT's why gave them this command. So they could measure up.

What kind of Sabbath Lord do you worship? Here's the problem. We are not free of thinking like that third servant in Jesus' parable I talked about at the beginning. We are not free of adopting the very same sinful view the Pharisees had. Our sinful nature is ALWAYS viewing our God as a demanding lord. Our sinful nature is always locked into thinking in terms of trying to measure up to what he demands. Sometimes despairing over our inability to do so. Sometimes filled with pride over falsely concluding we have.

We have this deeply engrained sin which wants to turn our Sabbath into a work. Now we know from the NT that the OT laws no longer bind us. Paul wrote they were a shadow about which no one can judge you any longer. We don't have to rest on Saturday. But God still wants us to spend time dedicated to him. When we talk about our Sabbath, we're talking about spending time in his Word. Spending time in worship. We have this deeply engrained sin which wants to turn that into a work. And it can either be a burden or a badge. It can be, "ugh, I can't believe I have to go to church again. This is so boring. I got better things to do!"...it can be a burden. Or it can be, "look at me. Aren't you so happy with me, God? Thank God, I'm not like those other members who so rarely come to church!"...it can be a badge. But either way, you've made it a work. You've made it into something God commands simply because he wants us to measure up...because he's a demanding lord.

And just like the Pharisees, we've missed the point. Here's how Jesus summed it up: The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. God didn't create the Sabbath so that man could measure up to IT. God gave the Sabbath as a blessing for his people. That's why Jesus didn't cite the Sabbath exemptions to the Pharisees. Instead he recalled an incident with King David to prove his point. You see, when David had been anointed as king but was not yet king. Instead he was on the run from the man he was to replace, Saul, who wanted to kill the man God had chosen to take his throne from him. He was on the run with his men and he came to the tabernacle. He asked the priest for food but all the priest had was the Bread of Presences...twelve loaves of bread baked fresh every day and placed on the a table in the tabernacle. That was to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, living in the presence, protection, and care of their God every moment of every day. It was also God's way of providing for the priests. When the day old bread was removed and replaced with fresh loaves, God commanded that the priests were to eat it. It was unlawful for anyone else. Jesus reminded that Pharisees that on that day, the priest gave that dedicated bread to David and his men. Do understand his point? God didn't make that law just so his people would do what he said, even at the expense of one's well being. David was the anointed king. Clearly it was God's

will that he live. And so the priest gave him and his companions the bread. It was command meant for blessing and both David and the priest understood and so they violating the outward form of the law itself. But still did what was pleasing to the Lord.

That was Jesus point about the Sabbath. God gave it to bless his people. He wanted his people to have the blessing of rest. It was never meant to be a burden or badge. It was meant to be a blessing.

Friends, when God asks us...when he commands us...to remain connected to him through his Word...in personal devotion or at public worship...he's not doing it so we can have a box to check next to our name...yup did that for the week. (pat on back). He commands it for our benefit and for our blessing. Because only through his Word do we receive rest...true spiritual rest through the message of sins forgiven. There we find the true meaning of Jesus' words, **So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.** Jesus said, **come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.** I will GIVE you rest. Jesus isn't a cruel master who's wanting to see if we're dedicated enough to wake up even on a Sunday. He's a Sabbath Lord who wants to give rest. He wants to give rest for sin-wearied souls. He wants us to see his cross where we find him in all his shame, taking our sins and nailing them to himself. He wants us to see him as our perfect substitute who delivered to us the ultimate comfort by dying our death and delivering his own obedience to us.

That is the Sabbath LORD we worship. Through that message God gives us peace. Freedom from guilt and death. True spiritual rest. Through that message he forgives us for turning such a gracious blessing into a burden or a badge. We lay those sins at his cross and marvel again as his blood covers them over and leaves us pure and holy in his sight.

And renewed by that grace, we see our Jesus as the gracious LORD who continues to invite us to come to him so that we might have rest. Whether at home or at church. Whether on Sunday or any other day of the week we have opportunity to worship. Whether publicly or privately, he gives the blessing of rest to comfort us, his people.

So what kind of Sabbath LORD do you worship? Remember what kind of a LORD he is. Not cruel or demanding. But gracious and giving. So that when he offers us rest...yes even as he COMMANDS we take it...we see it as the blessing of his grace which it is. Come to your Sabbath LORD and rejoice in the rest he gives. Amen.