

## God's Servant Opposed

### *Mark 2:23-3:12*

One of the activities that my grandkids enjoy is going to breakfast at the Original Pancake House with us. They love the food. They like the big chicken out front. They like the booths in which to sit and move around. They like the crayons and the kids activity sheet that they are given.

When they color however, they do it all "wrong". I suggest the blue color for the sky and they choose red. I suggest green for the grass and they choose yellow. I suggest that they color within the lines and they like to color freely with no boundaries. What do I do when they color all "wrong"? I smile and I laugh and I tell them that that I love the picture the way they have done it.

#### **Are kids made for coloring books OR are coloring books made for kids?**

That is an important question because it shapes how we view our world and the way we interact with each other. It defines how we view God and His law. It determines whether we treat the Jean Valjeans of this world like the kindly old priest who gave him the silver candlesticks or like Inspector Javert who committed his life to the letter of the law. **Are kids made for coloring books OR are coloring books made for kids?**

Jesus addresses the problem of judgmental externalism with a statement that answers this question, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."* (Mark 2:27 [ESV](#)). This statement is so profound that it blows up in our faces when we think of its practical implications.

I have enjoyed chewing on Jesus' words this week and **my goal this morning is to unwind what Jesus is teaching us about the Sabbath with the hopes that our Sundays will be radically different from this day forward.**

Perhaps inside, some of us are crossing the arms of our spirit and saying, *"My Sundays are great the way they are. I am not changing anything."* I understand. But I pray for more for each of us. I pray for more revival. I pray for more love for God and more for one another. I pray for more evangelism. I pray for more discipleship. I pray for more true community in Jesus' local church. I pray for more generosity and more hope. And I believe that the LORD can accomplish this in us individually and as a church family.

Jesus said *"For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."* (Matthew 17:20 [ESV](#)). With God all things are possible . . . even the

transformation of the personal Sunday habits that we enjoy and are not wanting to change.

**Main Idea: God gives each of us one day out of seven to refresh our soul and to engage Him in His mission. When we receive this gift in faith, God uses it to perform miracles in our lives. When we refuse this gift, we forfeit more than we can imagine.**

### **Sabbath Truths That Bring Us Joy**

#### **Truth #1: Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:28**

Though Jesus' public ministry is fairly new, Jesus has already gained the ire of the Pharisees. **The Pharisees dislike Jesus for many reasons.**

First, they are jealous of Jesus' popularity.

Second, Jesus' message calls everyone to repent of their sins. He does not just call those who are obvious sinners to repent. Jesus calls everyone including the Pharisees to repent.

Then Jesus prompts the Pharisees to outrage when He tells the paralytic, *"Son, your sins are forgiven."* They exclaim, *"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Mark 2:7 [ESV](#))

Then Jesus chooses to eat with tax collectors and sinners. And when the Pharisees call Jesus on that embarrassing faux pas, Jesus does not back down, but doubles down. Jesus replies, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Mark 2:17 [ESV](#))

Then Jesus defends his disciples when they do not fast like the Pharisees do. The Pharisees are irritated that Jesus does not respect them enough to follow their practices.

The anger of the Pharisees is now boiling into a fury. For the rest of Jesus' earthly ministry, **two events will solidify the malice of the Pharisees against him.** Both of these events **concern Jesus' teaching about the Sabbath.**

The first of these two events is found in Mark 2:23-28. Jesus takes us to an obscure wheat field in the countryside of Galilee. It is a sunny warm Sabbath day. Jesus' disciples have already worshipped the LORD in the synagogue together and they are now taking the equivalent of a Sunday afternoon walk together. As they talk, they snap off some of the mature heads of wheat that is near and rub them in their hands to separate the husks from the kernel. **Then they pop the kernels**

**in their mouths like we would some Cheetos.** The Pharisees are watching every move by Jesus and when they see the first disciple (probably Peter!) gobble some grain off a stalk and they are aghast. But then the other disciples join in and soon the crunch, crunch, crunch of the hard kernels reverberate in their ears. They rush upon Jesus and shout, *“Look! Why are your disciples breaking the law by harvesting on the Sabbath? And why are you not doing anything about it? Everyone can see what they are doing!”*

Should the disciples have stopped eating the grain when the Pharisees leveled the accusation against them? **Should the disciples have felt guilty when the long bony fingers of accusation were being pointed at them?** Jesus answered in a way that liberated them from submitting to the unbiblical constraints of the religious leaders.

**Truth: We look to the LORD to affirm or deny the goodness of our actions, choices and priorities. We do not look to men. We have an audience of One. If we are obedient to God’s Word, our consciences are free from the constraints of pleasing anyone but Him.**

Now if godly people are concerned about our choices and priorities and they bring an open Bible with them to talk with us about a matter in our lives, we would be foolish to not listen. We all have blind spots. We all need correction and even rebuke at times. Only scoffers and foolish people despise correction. **God often uses Christian community to clarify God’s will as set forward in the Bible.** But Jesus’ disciples are not slaves to other people’s self-made opinions.

Jesus first responds to the Pharisees by reminding them that David and his friends did something similar. **And then Jesus makes two amazing statements that shake our understanding of Jesus and the Sabbath to the core.**

*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.”” (Mark 2:27-28 [ESV](#))*

The last statement is the most profound and piercing of the two.

*So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”” (Mark 2:27-28 [ESV](#)).*

The Pharisees considered themselves to be the guardians and enforcers of all the law of God . . . but they placed a special focus on Sabbath keeping. Out of the one commandment that God gave to Moses regarding the Sabbath, **the Pharisees created 39 categories of activities that they forbid for Jewish people to do on the Sabbath.**

**If you asked the Pharisees, “Who is the Lord of the Sabbath?”** They would not have made the claim that they are. They would have replied, *“Yahweh is. He created the world and then rested on the seventh day to make it holy. Then under Moses He established the Ten Commandments for us to obey. The fourth commandment that Yahweh gives to us is “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.(Exodus 20:8). Yahweh is the Lord of the Sabbath.”* **The Pharisees knew that claiming to be “the Lord of the Sabbath” would be blasphemy since only God has that much authority to rule the day.**

Jesus in a bold profession of His deity says, **“The Son of Man (Jesus favorite Messianic title for Himself) is the lord even of the Sabbath.”** Think of this! Jesus is claiming the authority to tell every person everywhere what they can and what they cannot do on this most holy day of the week. **Who does that? Answer: Only God.** Jesus is saying, *“If I say that it is ok to walk through the grainfields and munch some wheat on the Sabbath, then it is ok to munch wheat on the Sabbath because my authority is absolute.”*

**Jesus is claiming a prerogative that is God’s alone thus making Himself to be equal to God.** This would not have been missed by the Pharisees. We can rightly imagine their faces becoming beet red when Jesus claims to be Lord of the Sabbath!

**Question: Is Jesus claiming to have greater authority than God’s Word?** No. Both communicate God’s will and truth to us. The written Word and the living Word possess equal authority because both are God’s Word to us. **Jesus and the Bible are always in agreement. God cannot lie so God never contradicts Himself.** Jesus is simply telling the Pharisees that they are wrong about their interpretations and applications of the Bible and that His authority is equal to the Bible.

**This radically changes everything about this day if we get our hearts around that claim!**

Let me ask you, **Application: “Is Jesus the Lord of your Sabbath? Is he the one who governs what you do with this day? ”**

Now Jesus is God so He is the Lord of every day.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:15-17 [ESV](#))*

Jesus created the world and everything in it. So without Jesus, there is no time, no days, no me, no you, no anything. He is the Lord of everything. So if we are following Jesus, we recognize His right to mess with our “Things to Do” list every day.

**Truth: The place to begin any significant life change is with prayerful meditation upon the Lordship of Jesus. If we become forgetful or dull in our active confession of Jesus’ Lordship, any change we make to our lives will be superficial. Only the force of Jesus Lordship is strong enough to drive spiritual change that separates us from sin and to God.**

Friends, a follower of Jesus becomes a follower of Jesus when they bow their knee to Jesus as Lord. This is the condition that we must meet in order to receive forgiveness of sin and any other blessing from Jesus. Some teach that you need only to receive Jesus as Savior in order to be rescued from sin and adopted into God’s family. But this is NOT what the Bible teaches. The requirement for entrance into God’s kingdom is simple submission to the King of God’s kingdom.

*because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (Romans 10:9-10 [ESV](#))*

Once we have bowed our knee to Jesus as Lord, it is the purpose of the believer to KEEP our knee bowed to Jesus every moment of every day. **This is where the spiritual war is most violent.** Our flesh presses against us every day and says, “Stand up! Be your own person. Stop bowing your knee to Jesus as your King.” The believer who does not feel this fight is the believer who has lost the battle and has already stopped bowing their knee to Jesus. How many believers are living life according to their own rule and desires?

Jesus presses a specific claim here in Mark 2. *So the Son of Man is lord **even** of the Sabbath.”” (Mark 2:27-28 [ESV](#)).*

So I again ask us to consider the specific question, ***“Is Jesus the Lord of my Sabbath?”*** If He is, then we are NOT going to presume that He wants us to do with our Sabbath exactly what WE want to do with our Sabbath. If we acknowledge Him as Lord of our Sabbath, it is right to do so consciously and frequently. **It is right to ask the question, “Lord, what would you want me to do with this day?”**

**I believe the Lord will surprise us if we ask Jesus that question with an open Bible and a humble heart. Our natural agenda is not the same as Jesus’ agenda. We must bend our natural agenda in submission if we are to be on the same page as Jesus.**

**Let us look now at this other radical statement that Jesus makes about the Sabbath.**

### **Truth #2: Jesus gives the Sabbath to refresh us.**

“And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27 [ESV](#))

The externalist or legalist gets everything upside down. **They think that man’s life purpose is to uphold external traditions.** They think that the best life is the life that did not mess with traditions, but rather successfully passed them on to the next generation. **Jesus upends this thinking by saying that the best life is the life that receives God’s grace that is behind and in and above His Law.** God gives us commands for our sake, not for the Law’s sake. **The Sabbath is not given to us by God to repress us but to refresh us.**

Here is the biblical logic behind Jesus’ statement. Man is created on the sixth day and the Sabbath was instituted on the seventh day. So by simple chronology man could not have been made for the Sabbath! **The Sabbath was made AFTER man was created in order to be a blessing and benefit to man.**

But more than that, God created man in His own image and likeness. God places a nobility upon man when He breathes into man the breath of life and man becomes a living soul. **Our created purpose is to KNOW GOD, to glorify God as God, to ENJOY God.** Our created purpose is not to accumulate wealth or have lots of fun experiences or to avoid stress. These are not wrong in themselves, but they will not fulfill us. **God knows that we are going to be tempted to be consumed**

**with our work in the garden.** So God gives us a whole day every week to readjust our priorities from this world to Him.

What a gift to us the Sabbath is!

**Truth: God gives us freedom on one day out of seven to set aside our day-to-day focus on work in the garden to give us room to refresh our souls . . . to reorder our lives . . . to think about our priorities and our direction . . . to do good to others.**

I often pray for spiritual revival for my own life and for our church. I believe that receiving this gift of the Sabbath is one of the keys to God doing a work of revival in our souls.

This world is not a friend to grace to help us on to God. **We need every one of the Lord's gifts to be strong the face of temptations and trials that mark our path. To neglect the Lord's graces is to choose to be defeated by the enemy.** We do not realize that is the choice that we are making when we do not receive the Lord's gifts of grace, but it is the outcome of our trying to live in our own strength against an enemy that is powerful enough to eat us for lunch with very little effort.

Physically, emotionally, spiritually and emotionally man is created to need renewal and refreshment once every seven days. **God gave the Sabbath as a gift to help us flourish every way. He did not give the Sabbath to the Jews only, but to all mankind from the beginning of creation.**

The New Testament believer is right to ask the question, **"How might I make the best use of Sundays as a day to renew my heart toward God and worship Him?"** But we are right not to look to human tradition to discover the answer. But we are right to acknowledge the opportunity that God gives us with the day of rest.

Often I feel some cravings inside my soul that yearn for more time to do the things that my heart really wants to do. I often feel too tired and worn out to do those things that are important to me. What is the answer besides just "pushing through"?

I think that the Sabbath gift from God is part of the solution. There is so much potential profit from this gift!

Here are some of "I wish" thoughts that often roll through my heart and that I know roll through some of your hearts:

I wish that I had more time to . . .

- read God's Word
- intercede for others
- encourage and bless my wife by serving her, listening to her, sharing my heart with her
- fellowship with people in my own church family
- invest in my children and grandchildren's lives
- visit the homebound or the lonely
- think about the direction of my life and plan some changes in my day-to-day choices
- exercise my body
- deepen my friendships
- serve in God's church
- be hospitable to others
- know my neighbors stories and share Jesus with them

I know that for many, six days of the week are packed with "garden" activities. This is from the Lord. We are right to see our labor as worship to the LORD on those six days. **But God gives us one day to have the freedom to do those activities that bring us back to our created purpose . . . that give us wholeness . . . that awaken us to His greatness . . . that strengthen His church.**

**God gives all of us time for these matters on one day out of every seven. Jesus made the Sabbath for US!** Why do so few followers of Jesus receive the gift of the Sabbath?

### **Obstacles that Stand in the Way of Sabbath Refreshment**

Obstacle #1: Externalism.

Obstacle #2: Neglect of assembling together.

Obstacle #3: Disregard for the day.

Obstacle #4: Selfish orientation. "It is my day. I can do whatever feels good in the moment with it."

Obstacle #5: Forfeiting the agency over our life. Illustration: sports on Sunday.

Obstacle #6: External chaos.

Illustration: Premarital counseling. Time together in the Word. "Yes. We are having trouble finding the time to do it." I say, "Let me encourage you. When you get married, it will be 100 times harder to find the time to do this."



**Main Idea: God gives each of us one day out of seven to refresh our soul and to engage Him in His mission. When we receive this gift in faith, God uses it to perform miracles in our lives. When we refuse this gift, we forfeit more than we can imagine.**

*“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24–25 ESV)*

**Truth #3: Jesus performs miracles in us on the Sabbath.**

*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.” (Mark 3:1-2 [ESV](#))*

The fury of the Pharisees toward Jesus is burning like a bonfire. It gets hotter and hotter each day with every sermon Jesus preaches and every miracle that Jesus performs.

The Pharisees bring a man with a withered hand into the synagogue on this Sabbath day because they want to trap Jesus. They KNOW that Jesus is a man of power and of mercy . . . so they use Jesus’ power and mercy to catch Jesus in a transgression of the Law. Is that not ridiculous?

**The Pharisees have a zeal for God but it is zeal that is untethered from scripture and so they hate the things that God loves.**

**Truth: Unbelief focuses the mind on the personal offense of Jesus’ claims to Lordship and makes a person blind to His glory. The person who wants to reject Jesus’ Lordship will always find a reason to overlook His power and His mercy.**

*3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” 4 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.” (Mark 3:3-4 [ESV](#))*

Jesus teaches that the Sabbath is a day to do good not avoid doing good. We are right to think of all the good things we might do on this day that we cannot because of “garden” responsibilities on the other six days.

*“And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart,” (Mark 3:5 [ESV](#))*

Jesus could have avoided this whole conflict by asking the man to come back the next day. But Jesus is unwilling to give an inch to the externalism that brings death to the souls of man. Here is the only explicit statement of Jesus' anger. But note that His anger is filled with grief and not malice. Jesus does not hate the Pharisees, but He hates the sin of self-righteousness that is killing them and killing the people.

*"and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored."  
(Mark 3:5 [ESV](#))*

Think of the joy of this man who lost something has treasured as a hand at some point in his life and now Jesus gives him back the use of it. Jesus does miracles so easily because His power is so great.

*"Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you." (Jeremiah 32:17 [ESV](#))*

Here is my observation: **Truth: Jesus loves to do miracles in us and for us on the Sabbath. We have more than a withered hand, we often have withered hearts. We need Jesus to make us whole and He invites us to use our Sabbaths to come to Him and allow Him to perform miracles of revival for us.**

I am not sure what is withering in your life . . . perhaps your marriage, perhaps your self-control, perhaps your joy, perhaps your peace, perhaps you walk with God, perhaps your service for Christ, perhaps your relationship with children, perhaps your witness for Jesus.

The power of Jesus to complete His work in us is sufficient. Let us receive the blessing of the Sabbath and go meet Him and seek the miracle He offers. Jesus loves to show His power on the Sabbath.

*"The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." (Mark 3:6 [ESV](#))*

What blindness! The Pharisees are livid over Jesus' healing a man's hand on the Sabbath, but they do not see the darkness of using the Sabbath to confer with the Herodians on how they might murder Jesus.

**Truth: We do not reject externalism because it is too zealous for righteousness. We reject externalism because it makes us blind to true righteousness.**

**Application: Pray, "Jesus, you are the Lord of MY Sabbath. How would you have me use this day to refresh my soul and fuel joy in my worship of You?"**

**Conclusion: Jesus is willing to be hated and put to death in order to bless you.**

**John 3:16.**

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