

Author: Patrick J Griffiths ©

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Title: Plucking of the grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28) - The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath (2:27, 28).

Text: Mark 2:23-28

Theme: In Christ His people are set free from bondage-forming rules and regulations.

The Eternal Value:

The strength of biblical faith is in the relationship it forms between God and His people. It is a tragedy of immense proportions to come to the end of days and realize that you clung to a form and not the object, the shadow and not the substance. It is possible to be religious and to be lost.

The Present Danger:

Our present danger lies in the smugness in which we keep our religious disciplines and look down on those whose form is different than ours. Our deception lies in believing our practice of religion takes precedence over the person and the relationship. Any ritual or religion or form or practice or discipline that keeps us away from God and our relationship with Him is to be shunned. And any ritual or religion or form or practice or discipline that draws us to God and our relationship with Him is to be embraced. All of this is different for each of us, but the essence of the Christian walk is our relationship with God through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Introduction:

“The doctrine of a new way (assuming it is a new way) is laid out further.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_2#Fasting_and_new_wineskins

“Today’s Gospel shows again the problems that Jesus posed for the authorities of His day. The issue in question is the purpose of the Sabbath. He highlights the fact that a law given for the good of God’s people was actually a burden to them. Instead of enjoying their day of rest and spending precious time in worshipping God - they were concerned not to transgress any of the additional rules imposed on the Sabbath.”

http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/weekly_wellsprings/year_b/sunday_09.htm

“According to the Gospels, Jesus was involved in sixteen healing miracles, whereby God, through Jesus and the power of faith, healed a person. The Gospel of Mark records ten consecutive incidents at the beginning of his Gospel where Jesus was involved with people being healed of their diseases. These healings were signs that the reign of God was present.” http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_healings_on_the_sabbathGA.htm

From the inception of our Lord’s ministry, the religious establishment sought to put Him to death. His person and works threatened their very existence. His kingship would destroy their man-centered, self-serving empire.

“Note, Ritual observances must give way to moral obligations; and that may be done in a case of necessity, which otherwise may not be done.”

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Mark.iii.html>

The sequence began in a synagogue with a sharp clash between Jesus and the Pharisaic champions of the strict moral code of the perishing world-age, a clash that came into focus because of a healing miracle. Now the sequence comes to a climactic end with another such sharp clash that focuses from the outset upon a healing miracle; this clash throws a bright light upon antithetical visions of God's will: to make life whole rather than to kill. <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#130>

THE BIG PICTURE:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ in Galilee - Early Galilean Ministry - His authority challenged [Ministry in Conflict]

- “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” - concerning the forgiving of sin (2:1-12)
- “Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?” - concerning the friends He kept (vv. 13-17)
- “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” - concerning the fast and food (vv. 18-22)
- “Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” - concerning the forsaking of the Sabbath (2:23-28)
- “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?” - concerning the forsaking of the Sabbath (3:1-6)

Questions:

1. What is more important to us, the saving of the lost or the maintaining of our image?
2. How far are we willing to go in order that the lost might be found and the gospel might be proclaimed?
3. Are we willing to give our time, our energy, our creaturely comforts and our physical comforts and life for the glorification and proclamation of God?
4. When have rules made to help people been abused?
5. How do you honor the idea of a day of rest?

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that the yoke of Christ is easy and His burden is light.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Him and live in His freedom.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of living free.

How will they best hear?

“This is a wonderful illustration of how degenerated a good religion can become. For the Pharisees, their religion had deteriorated into rules, regulations and rituals. Rulers, regulations and rituals became more important than mercy and kindness, more important than serving other human beings in need.”

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_healings_on_the_sabbathGA.htm

The commandments of Christ are not heavy, therefore if our religious expression is light, then something is right (1 John 5:3). When faith proves oppressive, then something is strangely out of place. A Christian walk that is compelled by doing is a walk marked by works and not by faith. Christians live because it is done and not because it is incomplete.

The yoke of Christ is easy and light, therefore if our religious expression is heavy, then something is wrong (Matt. 11:28-30). The intent of God in giving prohibitions and/or guidelines is that we might enjoy Him and all that He has provided. There is a serious flaw when all we see is the negativity to the Christian walk. Sin is wrong; everything else is right.

I. The location for the lesson (v. 23).

“The word suggests the party was pushing its way through the corn where there was no path. As they went, they plucked the ears and ate.” (Rogers & Rogers)

“The Pharisees appear suddenly, unexpectedly, in the grain-fields, as if they have been following along behind Jesus and the disciples since they first appeared in the Capernaum synagogue to observe his behavior and teaching which defy and repeatedly violate what they insist is strictly-ordained in the Law. The behavior which violates the law in this instance is fundamentally non-observance of the Sabbath, not usurpation of the rights of priests. It is violation of the Sabbath that his critics call to Jesus' attention, as stated explicitly in verse 23 and 24.” <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#130>

Does it not appear odd that while Jesus is traveling through a field of grain He is accompanied by Pharisees? Perhaps there was a larger crowd of those who followed and a part of the larger crowd were Pharisees, but it still appears odd. I would have to believe the owner of the field was a little perturbed by the trampling of his grain. I always find such ideas as these as the “dark side of grace.” This idea is found throughout Scripture.

- Israel from Egypt meant Egypt's demise.
- Israel's land possession meant the displacement of the occupiers.
- The healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12 meant ruin to the roof of the homeowner.
- Jesus walking through the fields of grain meant the landowners lost crop.
- Peter's deliverance from jail meant the jailor's death.
- The crucifixion of Christ meant the deception of Judas and the damnation of Pilate.
- God's victory and deliverance always has a dark side.

We do a disservice to the grace of God when we negate and ignore its dark side.

II. The accusation by the Pharisees (v. 24).

“On any ordinary day the disciples were doing what was freely permitted (Deut. 23:25). But this was done on the Sabbath and the Sabbath was hedged around with literally thousands of petty rules and regulations.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 63).

Covenanters’ Sabbath Rules - “No man shall eat on the Sabbath day except what was already prepared. Nor from what was lost in a field. And he shall not eat and drink except in the camp. . .” *Dead Sea Scrolls, Damascus Covenant (CD) 10.17-23*

Plucking Grain on Sabbath - “And one may pluck (grain) by hand and eat, but only if one plucks without a utensil; and one may rub and eat, but only if he does not rub a lot in a utensil.” These are the words of Rabbi Judah (ben El’ai). But the sages say: “One may rub with the tips of his fingers and eat, but only if he does not rub a lot with his hands in the way he does on a weekday.” *Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 128a*

III. The illustration of King David (vv. 25, 26)

Jesus cites the story which is told in 1 Samuel 21:1-6.

“Shewbread, in a biblical or Jewish context, refers to the cakes or loaves of bread which were always present on a specially dedicated table, in the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to God. An alternative, and more appropriate, translation would be *presence bread*, since the Bible requires that the bread is constantly in the presence of Yahweh (Exodus 25:30). Shewbread is described as twelve cakes/loaves baked from fine flour, arranged in two rows/piles on a table standing *before God*; each loaf/cake was to contain two *Omers* of flour (Leviticus 24:5-6). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Showbread>

The shewbread was changed every Sabbath day and the old loaves were eaten by the priests in a holy place (Lev. 24: 9). In the shewbread the 12 tribes were perpetually presented before God; yet it was wholly consumed by man; thus it provided both a sacrifice and a communion. On one occasion the shewbread was given to David to eat (1 Sam. 21: 6); the Lord drew from this incident the lesson that the law of charity overrides every ritual law (Matt. 12: 4; Mark 2: 26; Luke 6: 4). <http://scriptures.lds.org/en/bd/s/61>

Jesus cites the behavior of David and his followers on a particular occasion, not as an example of violation of the Sabbath and also not, I think, as an example of what God's anointed king may do, but chiefly as an example of human need that overrides any ritual obligations; this is the principle which the dictum of verse 27 will express in direct generalized form.

<http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#130>

“This, it is said, David did in the days of *Abiathar the High-Priest*; or *just before* the days of Abiathar, who immediately succeeded Abimelech his father in the pontificate, and, it is probable, was at that time his father's deputy, or assistant, in the office; and he it was that escaped the massacre, and brought the ephod to David.” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Mark.iii.html>

The Storyline of Scripture:

“He puts himself on a par with King David in the period when David, already anointed by Samuel but not yet enthroned, was on the run, gathering support, waiting for his time to come. That’s a pretty heavy claim: the implication is that Jesus is the true king, marked out by God but not yet recognized and enthroned. He therefore has the right, when he and his people are hungry, to by-pass the normal regulations. In other words, this kind of Sabbath-breaking, so far from being an act of casual or wanton civil disobedience, is a deliberate sign, like the refusal to fast: a sign that the King is here, that the kingdom is breaking in, that instead of waiting for the old creation to come to its point of rest the new creation is already bursting upon the old world. Jesus’ action, and its explanation, were a coded messianic claim, a claim that in him the new day was dawning in which even Israel’s God-given laws would be seen in a new light.” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 27, 28).

As Lord of the law, Jesus shows the significance of what was spoken in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Jesus does not reinterpret the law; what He does is give their true meaning.

IV. The application by the Lord (vv. 27, 28).

Verse 28 begins with “therefore.” “The word draws a logical conclusion.” (Rogers & Rogers).

“Man was not created to be the victim and the slave of Sabbath rules and regulations which were in the beginning created to make life fuller and better for man.” (William Barclay, Mark, 64).

A. Religion does not consist in rules and regulations.

“To take the matter in question – Sunday observance is important but there is a great deal more to religion than Sunday observance. Christianity has at all times consisted far more in doing things than in refraining from doing things.” (William Barclay, Mark, 64).

When our Christian walk, our walk of faith, is comprised of “to do lists” and what we can or cannot do, we have grossly mutated the relational aspect of our faith. Christianity is relational, and in the absence of this relationship, it is naked legalism.

Legalism is like the punishment faced by Sisyphus king of Corinth. His punishment for a crime committed against the gods was to roll a rock uphill and then watch it roll down again. An action he was to repeat forever:

“My name is Sisyphus; I am founder and king of Corinth. I am considered as a clever and rebellious hero in Greek mythology although I was punished for doing some things. First I cheat some of the Gods by stealing some secrets, then I was accused of the disappearance of Egea and later I almost die, fortunately I returned to earth and prove my wife chaste. I was chastised by working on the underworld with Aides, but I didn’t

like it so I kept Ades on a closet for one day. I was reported by this action so I was punished on Tartamus for eternity. My punishment was rolling a rock uphill and then watched it roll down again." (ELA - 10A - Greek Mythology Blog, Greek Mythology postings from Ms. Yates' 10A English class).

B. The first claim on any man is the claim of human need.

"If ever the performance of a man's religion stops him helping someone who is in need, his religion is not religion at all. **People matter far more than [programs]**. Persons are far more important than rituals." (William Barclay, Mark, 64).

C. The best way to use sacred things is to use them to help men.

"It can be that a church is more concerned with the elaboration of its services than with the help of its simple folk and the relief of its poor. But the sacred things are only truly sacred when they are used for men. The showbread was never so sacred as when it was used to feed a starving man. The Sabbath was never so sacred as when it was used to help those who needed help. **The final arbiter in the use of all things is love and not law.**" (William Barclay, Mark, 66).

Look how beautiful Jesus is for His people. Jesus stands with arms open to embrace all who come. He draws us in with powerful and compassionate arms. His embrace liberates the captive.

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here, what is our NEXT ACTION STEP?)

1. The yoke of Christ is easy and light and His commandments are not burdensome. Are we ready to stand firm in the freedom of the cross?
2. Are we acknowledging the work of God to free people?
3. He is here in our midst working miracles, healing the sick, setting the captive free. Do you see it, can you hear it?