

“Lord of the Sabbath”

Mark 2:23 – 3:6

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

25 Jesus answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

27 Then He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. 28 so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

3:1 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

4 Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

5 He looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

A fellow had been away fishing all day and had no luck. Not wanting to go home skunked, he stopped off at a local fish shop and asked the storekeeper to pick out three of the largest trout that he had. "Shall I wrap them for you?" asked the fishmonger. "No," replied the fisherman. "I'll stand here by the door, and you throw them to me from behind the counter." "Why in the world do you want me to throw them to you?" asked the shopkeeper. "Well," said the fisherman, "I've been fishing all day, and I haven't caught a thing. Now I may not be a good fisherman, but I'm a worse liar. And when I get home, my wife and kids are going to ask me if I caught anything . . . and I want to be able to tell them the truth." --Wesley Taylor
Now, is that telling the truth? Or was he telling his family a half-truth which some people consider to be a whole lie?

Our text for this morning is about keeping the Sabbath. The commandment concerning the Sabbath is found in Exodus chapter 20 and verses 8-11 and it reads, “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy, six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath

As I hinted to earlier it is important that we ask the right question. Too many of us ask “does this proposal fit into our tradition?”, “Have we ever done it that way before?”, or “Can I get away with it?” rather than asking the right questions: “does this thing do good?”, Does this decision show love to God and to my neighbor?” If following the rule leads to an act or even a thought that is without love or without mercy, then it is wrong. Jesus came to earth to seek and save the lost, not to commemorate the Sabbath or to make sure we were following the rules! The 10 Commandments are a guideline to help us to know how to live the best life possible. If you follow the 10 commandments you will have the best opportunity to live a full and meaningful, a fulfilling life. **[NOTE 7]**

Jesus is Lord—serve the Lord. If you are loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself, then the jot and tittle (the nitty gritty specifics) of the rules don’t matter as much. It doesn’t matter if your day of worship and rest, the day you set apart for God is Saturday, Sunday or any other day that ends in “Y”. It is not about outward religious performance! It is about who and what is in your heart. Is the Word of God, the person of Jesus Christ, the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit filling your heart, your life ...then you will live a fulfilled and meaningful life.

Jesus teaches us two main things in this passage of Scripture. First, the Sabbath was meant to be a day of physical restoration and spiritual renewal. The Sabbath is an opportunity to re-charge your batteries, a day set apart for God. It was created to serve us; to help us to live a higher quality of life. The second is that The Son of God, our Lord, Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath and we should be doing all we can each and every minute to make sure that Jesus Christ is the one who is in control, our master, our example, our Savior, our Lord. Grace takes over where the law has failed. The law of love always takes precedence or priority. Things like compassion, forgiveness, hope, joy, grace, and mercy were demonstrated clearly in the gospels (the stories of Jesus) as the basis for the decisions Jesus made. Let’s follow His example! Now what are you going to do about it! Let’s pray ...
AMEN

Just the thought makes me cringe. Here is a man in need! The way to make a living was taken from this man. In Jesus' eyes, if He were to fail to heal the man it would be the same as doing evil. Jesus' question to the Jewish leaders reveals that they would have to debate whether or not to refuse to save someone on the Sabbath. That is ridiculous. How far do rules and regulations take you? Not very far. How far does the love of Christ take you? As far as you want to go and further! This story reveals that the Pharisees had become so wrapped up in the letter of the law, in trying to make sure that they followed every rule that they ceased to live or love. And further, technically, Jesus only spoke a word to heal the man. He did no work. They also completely missed the fact that if Jesus' words were not in accordance with God's Will the man would not have been healed, since it is only God who can forgive sins and effect healing. So that emphasizes even more, along with the last verse, that the religious leaders were blinded and were only seeing their lost authority, their anger, and how Jesus was stirring things up and totally missing the fact that Jesus was displaying and living out love and compassion to all! The man's withered hand is nothing compared to the withered souls of the religious leaders. [NOTE 5]

I was talking earlier about changing my oil on Sunday. At my church in Wayland I owned my own home and I had a riding lawn mower. I considered mowing the grass on Sunday. Is it really work to ride a lawnmower? (pause) I'll bet each of you were starting to think about the physical exertion part, maybe even one of you thought it depends on whether it is pull start or electric start? See how easy it is to get caught up in the letter of the law? What matters is the law of love. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." That is the essence of the law. Live by that and you will automatically follow the 10 commandments. So the right question to ask is not whether it is allowable in the rulebook. The right question is, "Will this show love to God and to my neighbors?" The Spirit of the Law is love! The main reason NOT to cut down a tree, mow the lawn, or similar things on Sunday is that it might cause another person (my neighbor physically and in general) to stumble. Well, if the Pastor doesn't keep the Sabbath why should I. "See? they are all hypocrites anyway, they say one thing and do another." Can't you hear someone, a nominal Christian or neutral observer that had a run in with a Pastor or Church or Christian individual in the past, saying something like that? Having said that, I need to be transparent and admit that twice in the first three years that I was Pastor at Voice of Hope I mowed the lawn on Sunday. I believe those were bad decisions. [NOTE 6]

so they were trying to start their saw without pushing in the compression release button, or setting the choke properly. It's amazing how people can complain something doesn't work when they have never read the manual on how make it run at it's peak performance. The Bible is the human owners manual. You want to know how to have the best life you can have? Read your Bible, the human body owner's manual is right here (hold up Bible)! The wisest man that ever lived, Solomon, wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes (in the Old Testament) in verse 22 of chapter 2, "What does a person get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun?" He goes on to answer, "All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless." There is a time for everything and everything has its place in life. Work is not supposed to take precedence over enjoying life. We need a day off. **[NOTE 3]**

Technically, pastors work on Sunday so Biblically, we should set another day aside to be our Sabbath. But just because I have set aside a Tuesday or Saturday as my Sabbath should I go ahead and change my oil and rotate the tires on my car on Sunday? Why not? It's not my Sabbath. In the second part of our text for today Jesus has to decide whether to heal this guy's hand or not. The man's life is not in danger. Why not just wait till Monday to heal him. It's not a big deal is it? But Jesus does it anyway because it is good and right. Jesus asks the Jewish leaders, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" Does that mean that it is OK for me to change my oil on Sunday? I say, "NO." Technically I probably could if I were going by the letter of the law. But don't you think that I would be going against the spirit of the law because I would not be setting a good example for those around me. It is not the letter of the law that is the most important but rather, the spirit of the law! Ask yourself, "what it is trying to accomplish?" Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He proclaims it in verse 28. If you are "lord" of something, that means you are it's master, in control, having great authority over that thing. So Jesus is the master, the one in control of and the one who has authority over ... the Sabbath. What is the priority? On Jesus as Lord not any commandment, not any rule. Jesus' dispute with the religious leaders is not so much over the rules as much as who rules? Who or what gets primary weight, consideration, priority. **[NOTE 4]**

As Jesus and His disciples walked into the synagogue they met a man, whether by Pharisaical plot or by chance, who had a withered hand. The story in Hebrew literature, adds that the man was a mason. This could be significant because a mason without the use of one hand (a withered hand) would be as useful as a hand with broken fingers to a piano or guitar player!

loaves of bread were changed once a week and only the Levites, the Priests, were to eat the bread and then only in a holy place. It was a kind of sacrifice to God. But David and his men were in need so it was given. The Bible tacitly implies that, that is OK because no condemnation comes from anywhere about this event. **[NOTE 2]**

One of the pivotal verses in this passage is verse 27. Here Jesus seems to state the obvious but it is a very important point. Jesus simply says in verses 27 and 28, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." It is very simple. It is kind of a chicken or the egg thing ... which came first? But it is also much more. It is a priority thing. Man was created long before the Sabbath law came to be. People were not created to be victims and slaves of the Sabbath rules and regulations which were, in the beginning, created to make life more full and more rich. God was the supreme example. He worked six days and then He took a rest on the seventh. Not because He had to! He is an infinite being, meaning His resources of energy, intellect, strength, etc. are without limitation and without end. So the only reason to rest on the seventh day was to be an example to us. People of God, you were created to rest one day out of 7. If you want your body to operate at maximum efficiency you need to take one day off! If you want to be your best self, if you want to perform, act, react, communicate, work and play to the best of your ability ... then you must get a day of rest! We were created to get regular periods of sleep. Each of us is different, but the vast majority of people operate at their peak level when they have had 7-8 hours of sleep. Obviously there are exceptions to the average so there is no need to rush up to me after the sermon and tell me that you function great on 5 hours of sleep. I will regard you with skepticism but who am I to tell anyone else what their optimum number of hours of sleep is? Most of us are like the lady who went to her doctor and said, "Doctor, I know I have been working too hard and it just seems impossible to sleep more than 4 hours a night but I don't want you to tell me to stop burning the candle at both ends. What I need is more candle."

Stop and think about it a minute. God created us and knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows and it has been proven scientifically that if we human beings work seven days a week without a break for very long, we start to break down. If God thinks we need one day off a week, doesn't it make sense to listen? There are people all over the world that are trying to live and operate who have never read the manual? I was looking for a new chainsaw after being told it would cost me \$250 plus to fix my old one. I read many reviews. Some people complained that their saw was hard to start but it was obvious from their words that they never read the manual

to the Lord your God. On it you shall NOT do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. But HE rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

The Pharisees looked at that and immediately questioned, “What counts as work?” They missed the part that about keeping a day set apart for God and focused on the negative. “What does it mean when it says, “On it you shall not do any work ...?” What is your definition of work? Should we be focused on what the correct definition of work is? Or should we focus on setting apart a day for the Lord in our mind and heart? What do you think??

[NOTE 1] As Jesus and His disciples were walking the disciples got hungry, so they picked the ripened grain (wheat I suspect) shucked the skins and blew them into the wind and ate the kernels. They were hungry so they ate. Seems pretty innocent doesn't it? But the Pharisees had strict rules they had come up with concerning reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing a meal on the Sabbath Day. Of course, it wasn't illegal to eat on Sunday but they had specific rules. The Pharisees saw this as an opportunity to recover some of their authority. Jesus did not make life easy for the Pharisees. Jesus pointed out their flawed religiosity. Jesus spoke out against following the rules for the sake of being a rule follower. The Pharisees were rule followers not God-followers and certainly not Christ-followers. Jesus taught that life is not about following the rules, but that is what the Pharisees were so good at. They had Sabbath-keeping down to a science. How far they could walk without it being work, they could tie a knot if it could be untied with one hand. But it was a sin if you needed two hands to untie it. It sounds almost ridiculous. But there are some even today that are severely against going out to eat on Sunday because it forces others to work. There are some for whom it is OK to ride your bike but you can't go swimming on a Sunday. You see, if life and religion is all about the rules, it doesn't take long for things to get ridiculous.

So the Pharisees go to Jesus and in verse 24 they ask Him, “Why do your disciples break the law?” Jesus doesn't even argue whether the disciples were breaking the Pharisaical law or not. He does, however, contest their view of the Sabbath. Their view of the Sabbath kills the Spirit of the Law. Jesus points the Pharisees to 1 Samuel 21 in their Scriptures. In that story David and his men are in need. So the priest gives them the “Bread of the Presence”, which was 12 loaves of bread which were placed on a golden table three feet long and 1.5 feet wide and 1.5 feet tall. The table stood in the tabernacle/temple right in front of the Holy of Holies. These

SERMON NOTES for “Lord of the Sabbath”

On Mark 2:23 – 3:6 given at Voice of Hope Church August 17, 2014

Doster Community Church August 24, 2025

- I. To keep the Sabbath Day holy means to keep it set apart for God. It is not about following the rules specifically, but that is what the Pharisees were good at.
- II. The law was created for us. It is to be a guideline for living the best full and meaningful life possible.
- III. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus is Lord of ALL or not at all.
- IV. The man’s withered hand is nothing compared to the withered souls of these religious leaders.
- V. The Spirit of the Law is Love. If we love our neighbors we should not want them to stumble.
- VI. It is important to consider if we are asking the right questions. Jesus asks, “Who needs help?” not “What do the rules say?”
- VII. Grace takes over where the Law fails. The law of Love always takes precedence. It’s not about outward religious performance. It is about what’s in your heart. If Jesus/love is in your heart, then you are on the right track. What are you going to do about it?