

Mark 2:23-3:6
Sabbath Questions

There are words that we associate with Jesus – love, compassion, grace, humility, gentle and lowly of heart, teacher, healer, demanding, renegade, provocateur.

One word we don't often associate with Jesus is 'angry', but in today's passage we get a glimpse of the anger of Jesus.

One of the distinctives of the Jewish people from the beginning was, and is, the observance of the Sabbath. And part of that distinctive has been an ongoing discussion and debate about what is permissible on the Sabbath.

Christians today are still having that discussion.

We're in good company because it was a HOT TOPIC in the ministry of Jesus as he was often at odds with the religious leaders about the purpose and the practice of the Sabbath.

We are early in the gospel of Mark and early in the ministry of Jesus, but we're seeing a rising tension between Jesus and the religious leaders.

23 And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25 And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; 26 how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" 27 Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

1 He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. 2 They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3 He *said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" 4 And He *said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. 5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He *said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

These two stories are told together in Matt, Mark, and Luke

There are two distinct stories described in this section but they both revolve around the same issue – What is allowed on the Sabbath? Jesus raises the question by his actions on the Sabbath.

v. 23-27 Lord Of the Sabbath

Jesus schools the Pharisees and leaves them contemplating His claim of authority. The claim amounts to a claim to be God.

Who instituted the Sabbath? God, so only God could be Lord of the Sabbath.

Mark does not mention the response of the Pharisees until 3:6

By the time of Jesus, the Jews had developed a huge set of extra-biblical rules for the Sabbath that turned it from being a gift from God to a burden for their daily lives.

In the first narrative, the Pharisees seem to be stalking Jesus and his disciples and they notice that they are picking grain from the stalks. They quickly jump in and make an accusation regarding the Sabbath

laws.

It is appropriate to note just how IMPORTANT the Sabbath was to the Jews. Along with circumcision, it was a defining feature of their spiritual, cultural, religious, and personal identity. It was something that separated them from other cultures and groups. The Sabbath commandment (#4) is the longest and it has its roots in the creation ordinance of Gen 1-2 Sabbath keeping was the one commandment that showed them, and us, how to imitate God Himself. God rested on the seventh day so should we.

Dr. Sproul notes that after the laws given at Mt. Sinai, the rabbis had devoted themselves to finetuning the law and coming up with specific prohibitions to carefully guard the observation of the Sabbath day. They included many details found nowhere in sacred Scripture, but their tradition became as binding on the people's consciences as Scripture itself.

Some of those prohibitions had to do with the Sabbath-day's journey. Jewish people were not allowed to travel more than what was called a "Sabbath-day's journey" on the Sabbath, and the rabbis defined the Sabbath day's journey as 1,999 paces, or roughly eight hundred meters. If you stepped along 1,999 paces, you were okay. If you took one more step, you were a Sabbath-breaker, and you had desecrated that holy day. Presumably, that rabbinic prohibition was in view here because when the disciples walked through the grainfields searching for something to eat, they likely went over the limit of 1,999 steps.

** I wonder if the rabbis went over the limit while they were following the disciples.

Jesus' statement, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" was not a critique of the OT Law. It was a critique of all the OTHER laws that had been adopted and laid on the shoulders of the people.

EX: it was unlawful to untie a knot on the Sabbath; If you had to sew a garment you could sew ONE STITCH, not two. You could write A letter, but not two. You could help in a life-threatening situation, but if someone had a broken wrist you had to wait until after the Sabbath to splint it. If a building fell you could look for survivors and treat those whose life was in danger, but others had to wait to be pulled out. Etc,etc.

We should note that Jesus DID NOT downplay the importance of the Fourth Commandment regarding the Sabbath; He was reacting to the extra laws that were piled on the Commandment.

Other work such as harvesting crops was prohibited so the disciples violated this by picking grain from the stalks. The rabbis would see this as a major offense.

Notice that Jesus responded by taking them to the Word of God. It would be easy to think of Jesus as the original Bible thumper. He used the actual Word while the Pharisees tended to cite the extra biblical teachings of the rabbis that had grown over the years.

His point in going to the story of David IS NOT to compare his disciples to the followers of David. David and his men were being pursued by King Saul who wanted to kill them, and they were hungry. There is no indication that Jesus and his disciples were hungry or in danger. They were passing through the grainfields. That in itself would have been suspicious to the rabbis, and now they start picking the grain, so the rabbis jump in with their question/accusation.

The point of the story from Jesus IS NOT "Look we're like David and his band of followers who were hungry and in danger and they ate the consecrated bread, so leave us alone."

NO, the point of the illustration from 1 Sam 21 is the comparison between David and Jesus. He notes that David, the King, had the right to take the consecrated bread. So too, Jesus, as Messiah is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus makes a claim that goes beyond mere kingship in human affairs. He is Lord of the Sabbath i.e. He is claiming authority over the Sabbath. He is claiming to be God who created the Sabbath. Isaiah

58:13 says that the sabbath is Yahweh's holy day. Jesus then tells them why it was created....The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Jesus is actually confronting those who are avoiding God and His law by adding their own rules and regulations. Some people avoid God by acting badly. Some avoid God by acting super religious. The human heart is such that we would rather obey a lot of rules and earn our standing before God than come and admit that we have nothing to bring.

“ Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling” is the cry of one whose heart has been changed. That is NOT the cry of the natural man or woman. The natural heart wants to say, “I did it my way.”

We would rather pile up 100 manmade laws that we think we can keep than humble ourselves before One law of God that we can't keep – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”

In this narrative the Pharisees come into direct conflict with Jesus who is not just the Lord of the Sabbath; He is the Lord over ALL.

3:1-6 IS IT LAWFUL TO DO GOOD?

Mark now switches gears and Jesus is back in the synagogue where he'll have another run in with the Pharisees, who were watching him (v 2). They wanted to see if he would 'break a Sabbath law', i.e. one of their laws about healing on the Sabbath. No such law existed in the OT, but they had piled on their own laws over the centuries.

v. 3-4 Jesus sets up an awkward conflict as he puts the Pharisees on the spot. They remain silent and he is ANGRY with them, grieved that their hardness of heart.

v. 3 – Jesus initiates this whole scene by calling the man to come forward. AWKWARD. The man is now on the spot in front of the synagogue crowd.

Waiting one more day to heal the man would not have made much difference but the Lord of the Sabbath was here to make a point and he does so by asking the question of v. 4. Now the Pharisees are on the spot as Jesus gives them an easy question to answer.

This should be a no brainer, right?

Doing good works on the Sabbath is not just permissible, they SHOULD BE DONE ON THE SABBATH. There is no better day for doing good to others.

v. 5 The lack of response of the Pharisees smacks of indifference, hardness of heart and spiritual blindness, i.e. a lack of love, and it grieves the heart of Jesus to the point of anger....righteous anger.

“Hardness of heart” is a phrase that refers to a willful refusal to accept what is right in front of them. It is a willful blindness. The same term is used in Eph 4:18

¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, ¹⁹excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

v. 6 The plot to kill Jesus

Jesus exposes a sharp contrast between Himself and the Pharisees. He raises the question, “is it lawful to good, to save a life or to kill?”

He intends to do good to this man and Mark explains that the Pharisees go out and conspire with the Herodians as to how they might kill Jesus.

To save a life or to Kill is exposed in this one interaction. Jesus came to save not just one life, but many. The Pharisees set out to kill him. Plotting to kill the Lord of the Sabbath on the Sabbath is the pinnacle of violating the Sabbath, but they are too blind to see that.

Little do they know that they are playing a part in the death of Christ which brings eternal life to those who trust him.

The Pharisees and Herodians are strange bedfellows. They are NOT natural allies. The Pharisees were for a strong Jewish culture and state. The Herodians were supporters of the non-Jewish royal family of Herod. Herod's son ruled as a client king for Rome.

The relationship between these two groups shows how both sides of the culture saw Jesus as a threat – the religious leaders and the secular leaders were united against him.

The Pharisees are increasingly suspicious and fearful of Jesus – His preaching, healing, casting out demons, and claims that make him equal to God. These two incidents early in the gospel of Mark show how their hard hearts and evil plans were quickly exposed.

We also see a frightful trait of the human heart exposed – it is a short journey from hatred to murder. Once they become skeptical of Jesus they descend the slippery slope very quickly. Everything he does becomes suspect in their eyes. We can only imagine what the conversation was like between the Pharisees and the Herodians as they conspired to kill Jesus.

What we see in this text and all of scripture is that the religious person and the atheist are really the same: both are haters of God. They just express it in different ways.

We live with a sort of myth that no one has a problem with Jesus; people just don't like the church or church people.

REALLY? If so, then why did so many want to kill him? And today, why do so many want to revise Him and His message to fit their own agenda? People may make polite comments about Jesus from a distance, but once His teaching and His claims become clear, watch out. The polite indifference becomes active opposition unless they come to Christ in repentant faith.

The trend through history has been to try to put Jesus in our own cultural or spiritual box or use him as a mascot or accessory. That doesn't work.

When we come to grips with who He really is then we are faced with a decision. Will I follow Him or 'kill' him?

Men Naturally God's Enemies. J. Edwards

Mankind has a natural confirmation bias against God. We have a natural bent opposed to the nature and character of God. Apart from the gracious work of God in our souls, we are God's enemies. We may not think of it in those terms, but it is true. We hate God's holiness, His omniscience, His justice, His power, etc. We question his heart and motives, and we'd rather run our own lives. Jesus, the visible image of the invisible God, was seen as a threat even to those who were waiting for the Messiah.

CONCLUSION:

THIS SECTION doesn't answer the Sabbath practice issue of our day. That was not its intent. The real focus is on Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath, i.e. God Himself.

When we understand the biblical teaching on the natural condition of mankind, we can better understand the hostility that Jesus encountered in his ministry.

Now rarely will a man or woman come out and say that he or she hates God. Rarely will they admit it even to themselves. But there are many truths we don't admit to ourselves and certainly don't admit to others.

** I don't know where you are in terms of your view of or relationship with Jesus, but if you think you can stay in a place of neutrality, you are wrong. And why would you want to? Embrace the One who gave Himself for you, the only one who can forgive and redeem you.

If you are trusting or living for anything or anyone other than Jesus, KNOW THIS, whatever or whoever it is

won't die for you, can't bring forgiveness and eternal life, or reconcile you to God.

This passage is just one of many that causes us to stop and consider the question, "Who is Jesus?" That is THE MOST IMPORTANT question that you must answer.

The question is really an invitation to put your trust in the one who is the Son of Man, The Son of God, and the friend and Savior of sinners.

<https://bibleportal.com/sermon/Jonathan-Edwards/men-naturally-are-god-s-enemies>