



Lord of the Sabbath

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Mark 2:23-28

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²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And 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 was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

(Pastor prays)

In the early 1940s, as World War Two raged on, the Nazi war machine turned its attention from going West toward England to going East into Russia, but they needed manpower. With all of the available soldiers at the front, the factories were shutting down, the armaments were not producing, so they had to come up with something called "the final solution." That was the full extermination of the Jewish population up in Eastern Europe. The final solution included gas chambers and death camps. It's a horrific thing. You've seen it in history. But as the war raged on, the Nazi regime needed people to work, and so they started taking people out of the death camps and putting

them into slave labor. Seven days a week you would work in the factories in Germany. It is said that if you were able to avoid the gas chamber, if you were able to not go to one of those death camps (which was guaranteed death), if you were able to get to a slave labor camp, your expected lifespan was four weeks. Besides the hard labor, deficient food, and the rank living conditions, one of the major factors contributing to such a terrible death rate was that there was never something to look forward to, never something to think about in the future.

People can't live like that. You can't live like that. You and I are not designed to live like that. From the very dawn of creation in Genesis 1:2, God designed man and woman, human beings, to have one day that is unlike any other. It is a day that is set aside. God will even go so far as to take and make the Sabbath Day one of The Ten Commandments. When you read The Ten Commandments, you find out that the commandment on the Sabbath Day is the longest of The Ten Commandments. He did that for a reason. He did that so that humans would flourish. He did that so that His people would flourish as they went into the land. Like so many other good things that God does, over the centuries, the religious thinkers, would build fence after fence after fence around the commandment in order to protect the commandment. But with fence after fence after fence, by the time Jesus shows up on the scene in Mark Chapter 2, the commandment that was given for the good freeing of the people had become harsh and restrictive and legalistic. It now had perverted God's good intent for that one day.

In the passage before us, Jesus is in trouble again. In fact, the sequence is here. There are six times, back-to-back-to-back, that Mark is writing to a Gentile church in Rome. He wrote this for the new church to show them that Jesus is full of grace and how He's in trouble and trouble and trouble. The first time written of Jesus being in trouble is that He claims to have the authority to forgive sins. Remember that with the paralytic. The second time He's in trouble is when He calls Levi, who is Matthew, who wrote the book of Matthew. He calls Levi to follow him. Levi is so overcome with joy, he throws a

party for Jesus. Levi invites all of his friends who are tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees see Jesus eating with the tax collectors so He's in trouble. The third time He's in trouble is when John the Baptist and his disciples and the Pharisees and their disciples are all fasting in an effort to show how close they are to God. And Jesus and His disciples are not fasting. But this time, this time is different. This time He's in trouble because of the accusation of breaking a commandment. And in this passage, Jesus scrubs all of the barnacles of legalism away to show us the glorious freedom, to show us the wonderful flourishing He brings to every man and woman who will follow Him. You are not designed to be ground down into fine powder. You are not designed to be weighed down with burdens that have made your life despondent. God didn't make you to dread each day, to be overwhelmed with work and weighed down by care. He's come to lighten your load. He's come to strengthen your soul. He's come to save your life. When you read this passage I want you to see that...

Jesus Doesn't Enslave People, He Frees Them.

Jesus doesn't enslave people. He frees them. Let's go to the Bible and see if we can get at it. Let's make it like a Bible study. I'll try to hang some points and give you something to sort of hold on to. We'll keep going back to the Bible. This will all be centered on Jesus, as every sermon should be. Here's the first one. Number one:

Jesus doesn't put burdens on you, He removes them.

Jesus does not put burdens on you. He removes them. Join the story right there in Mark. Notice how he gives us some background in verses 23 and 24. Let me read it with some comment. Join me there. You just keep looking at the Bible. I'll tell you a couple of things. On one Sabbath, Mark just stacks these stories up for us, and we don't know the time frame when this happened. What we know is this is the Sabbath day. It's Saturday, the Jewish day of rest. It's the day of the commandment, the day when God rested on a Sabbath. Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as they made their

way, His disciples began to pluck heads of grain. They weren't harvesting. It was a time of harvest when you're not allowed to work. This feels like work to the Pharisee. So the Pharisees were saying to Him, Jesus, "why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Now it's one thing, not the fast, that was just a tradition. It's another thing altogether to be accused of breaking one of The Ten Commandments. That's exactly what the Pharisees are doing down in verse 24. "Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" So when I'm reading this, I'll start wondering, were they actually breaking one of the commandments? I mean, the commandment is to keep the Sabbath day holy, so harvesting would be working. So if they were harvesting those grains, yes, then they were breaking it. But Deuteronomy tells us in Deuteronomy 23, that you can pick the kernels with your hands but you couldn't put a sickle to the standing grain. It was sort of the welfare system in Judaism, if you were harvesting a field, you'd keep the corners of the fields so that those who didn't have anything could walk through and have something to eat. So it was allowed to do that.

Maybe that's not what the Pharisees were talking about. Maybe they were talking about the fact that they were walking. You see, over the years, the religious leaders, in an effort to come up with ways to keep people from working and to keep them from breaking the commandment, if the commandment was to keep the Sabbath day holy and not working, they started coming up with rules and rules and rules. In fact, the Talmud, the Jewish commentary, the Talmud would have 29 pages of things you can't do on the Sabbath day. There are several things. One of the things you couldn't do was walk. You couldn't walk more than 1999 steps on the Sabbath day. So if you have an Apple Watch or step counter, you can look back. And for a lot of you, every day is the Sabbath day. I don't know how they counted the steps, but you couldn't walk them. Also, if you were a carpenter, you couldn't carry a saw. If you were a scribe, you couldn't carry a pen. If you were a tailor, you couldn't thread a needle or even carry the needle. If you had two balls in your hand, you couldn't throw it up with one hand and catch it with the other. So I don't know what you would do. One of the rules— this is no joke— one of

the rules was that a woman was not allowed to look in the mirror on the Sabbath day because she might see a gray hair and be tempted to pluck it out. I didn't make that up. That's what the Talmud said.

So you can see how all of these rules they had put over the Sabbath Day were crusting it so that all of the joy of rest was gone. And the rules overlaying the Sabbath day had become so oppressive that the Sabbath day was no longer a blessing. It was a burden. Look, it's what legalism does. Be careful with your Christianity when you walk away from grace and into legalism. It's what man-made tradition does. It takes what God has given to free us and to relieve us and makes it oppressive. It makes knowing God a burden. Then Jesus walks in. Jesus comes in not with legalism and oppression and slavery, not with pressure. What does Matthew tell us? He said, "Jesus says, 'come to me, all of you, who are heavy laden. You're burdened. Come to me, I'll give you rest. You take the yoke that I have upon you. Learn from me. You see, I am gentle and lowly in heart.' You'll find rest for your souls as Jesus takes your burden and puts it on His back."

We preach this every Sunday when we talk about the Gospel. What do we mean when we talk about Gospel? We don't just mean living right. We mean the Gospel saves us. The Gospel teaches that all of us have sinned before God and stand under condemnation. God created us to live in fellowship with Him. Our lives break that fellowship. We are sinners. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death and we're separated from God. But the Bible also gives us the Gospel. The Gospel is Jesus Christ who comes as a man. He lives in the place of men and women. He does what we should have done, lived perfectly in fellowship with God. He does that for us. Then He goes to the cross and we've got a debt to pay. We have punishment. You see at the cross all of the punishment that was supposed to be ours. Look, every sin you've ever committed, all of your sins are at the cross, they are punished on Jesus. And the Gospel promise is that if you'll look to Jesus as your substitute, He will save you. That's the Gospel.

But let's not forget that as Gospel believers, we trust that all of our burdens are there too. He also takes our burdens to the cross. Would you, right now, even with your eyes open, or bow your head, ask God in the name of Jesus, to lift your burden? Ask God right now. Ask Him to lift your burden. Whatever sin it is that has you trapped, ask God to lift whatever pain has you crippled. Ask God to lift it. Maybe you see the clouds of depression starting to gather around your heart. Ask God to take those away. Maybe you're just spiritually exhausted. Ask God to renew your soul. Maybe you've got this harbored hatred for someone who really did you wrong and you just can't let go. Ask God and watch it evaporate. Maybe you've struggled with some bitterness toward someone; ask God. Let's take that burden and nail it to the cross. You see Jesus doesn't put burdens on you. He removes them.

There's something else to look at when you think about Jesus. Let's get into the story itself. Here's the second thing that Jesus doesn't do. Number Two:

Jesus doesn't break the law. A few years ago, a prosperity preacher said Jesus breaks the law for love.

Jesus does not break the law. He fulfills it.

I'm going to read you verses 25 and 26. Jesus uses an argument. It's a "how much more" argument. It is a "lesser to greater" argument. I'll try to illustrate the argument in my house. We have a 10-year-old Beagle named Spurgeon. Spurgeon is completely useless. He's loud, he eats, he doesn't do tricks. He sleeps. There's nothing special about that dog. Beagles live a long time. We're halfway through, I'm guessing, with this dog. Every morning Connie gets up and she feeds that dog and talks nice to that dog and pets that dog. That's the lesser, so I can look at that activity that's going on with that dog and make a greater argument. If that dog doesn't do anything in this house yet gets talked nice to and fed and even petted, then how much better will I be treated by Connie? I find myself comparing myself to a dog.

So what you're gonna watch Jesus do here is that He's going to take a story from David's life. 1st Samuel is going to tell the story when David's on the run

from Saul. He goes into the Tabernacle and takes the show bread and eats it. He's not supposed to eat that bread. There are 12 loaves which are reserved only for the priests. They would eat those once a week on the Sabbath day. They would trade them out each week, and nobody eats the show bread but the priest. David eats that and is he held accountable? It's not reckoned to him as something wrong. And what Jesus is going to say is, if David did that, how much more should it be okay for what we're doing?

So let's go to it in verse 25-26. ²⁵ *And he said to them, "Have you never read.* (Let me pause here. That was an insult. That was Jesus saying, "Don't you know the Bible?" Have you ever had somebody say, Well, my Bible says...as if somehow your Bible is deficient. Jesus is saying, haven't you read the Bible?) *And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him* ²⁶ *how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"* And here's the point that Jesus is making. If David could do that and actually break a law, how much more can Jesus just break a tradition?

There are a couple things here. There are a couple of things to roll around in our hearts. The first one is kind of a practical application. While it was not normal and it was not lawful for David and his men to eat the bread of the presence, those 12 loaves on a gold table in front of the Ark. They should not have eaten those. It was not lawful and not normal for them to eat them. It was also the case that God didn't want David and his men to starve. So you have this meeting of a human need over a ritual requirement. This is the story of the Good Samaritan and the priest walking by. That is one way to understand it. But there's more to it. I think there's a theological message here. Jesus, when He uses David, is inviting a comparison between David and Himself. And He's saying David is a lesser king. Jesus is a greater David. David is the lesser king. Jesus is the Greater David and Jesus will fulfill all the law and all the prophecies of this king coming in the line of David. And if David

ate the bread of the presence, then Jesus is the bread of life. And his appearance right here is when it starts to shift. His appearance signals a shift. It signals a new day. It's a lifting of the burdens, a fulfilling of the law. Now look, Jesus is not in any way downplaying the law. He is not in any way breaking commandments. He's downplaying all the legalism, all of the oppressive tradition that has so clouded the eyes of the people that they couldn't see God, they couldn't feel hope. They couldn't know life. And now Jesus comes to make things right. He comes to lift your burden and to feed your soul. There are so many people sitting in the congregation right now who feel empty and hollow and listless and detached.

And here comes Jesus. He fulfills all the requirements, all the requirements that God has for His people. He fulfills all of the hard discipline, all of the keeping of the law. He does all of that and He comes in and removes the heavy yoke. The yoke of legalism is choking but He removes the heavy yoke of legalism and He attaches to you a yoke of grace. You can't even feel it. You see, the Cross of Jesus promises grace. Do you feel trapped? Do you feel defeated? Do you feel lost? Listen, Jesus doesn't enslave people. He frees them. He doesn't put burdens on you. He removes them. Jesus didn't break the law, He fulfills it.

Let's pick up the pace a little bit. The story gets astounding here in verse 27 and verse 28. I'll give you the third thing Jesus doesn't do. Number Three:

Jesus doesn't bind us, He frees us.

See what I mean in verse 27. It's just a remarkable and revolutionary thing for Jesus to say in verse 27. ²⁷ *And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."* ²⁸ *So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.* Look, even how it's said, it's poetic. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. On either end of the sentence is the word "Sabbath." Rest is made for man in the middle. He says to the Pharisees: "you got it all wrong. God made this day to serve man's needs. He didn't make man to serve this day's needs." Why did God give us the Sabbath? Why did He

make it so that in the pattern there are six days to work, one to rest? Well, very basically, He just gave us that one need, a day of rest. You need to rest. You need a day of rest. You are not Superman or Superwoman. You need rest. God gave us a day. He did that by design. You are designed to have a day to rest. You are designed to have a day where you worship, a day where you remember the good grace of God. That you have a God who loves you, you remember that. A day is given to God's people to distinguish us from all the other people in the world, because there is a day made especially for them, they stop. God's people have a different day to be distinguished, to protest against our culture that has turned its back on God. This is a form of protest. This day shows dependence. One day you say that "I'm not working today. I know God will provide." We're trusting that God provides. This one day is imitating God from creation. He didn't need to rest after six days of creation, He did. And we, as His people, we imitate Him to celebrate creation.

Why is the Sabbath given to mankind? It's for the good of your body. It's for the good of your soul, so that we don't get weary. The Sabbath, then, was given to point us to the greater rest that is in Christ. That's the argument that the writer of Hebrews speaks to in Hebrews 4:9-10. He says, ⁹ *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,* ¹⁰ *for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

Why do we worship on Sunday? Andy Davis is the great pastor at First Baptist Durham, NC. Andy Davis tells us that the days are different, and here's why. The Old Testament looks back at Creation and the law and the Sabbath. The new Covenant looks forward to the new creation and the Lord's Day. The Old Covenant has its week *ending* with the Sabbath. The New Covenant has its week *starting* with the Lord's Day. I think Paul, when he wrote to the church at Colossi is very helpful. Colossians 2:16-17 is very helpful when I think through why we worship like we do on a Sunday. This is what it says, ¹⁶ *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.* ¹⁷ *These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

You see our rest is in Christ. Our joy is in Christ. Our strength is in Christ and our righteousness before God is in Christ. Our purpose in life, our direction, the forgiveness we receive is in Jesus. Rest, your souls need rest. You see, Jesus doesn't bind us, He frees.

What is it then? What is it that's got you all bound up? Is it an unsure future? Is it some sort of unresolved, unreconciled friendship? What is it? What has you? Jesus comes not to bind you. The Gospel comes to free us. Let me give you one last bombshell from Jesus down in verse 28, I'll just give this point the title,

Jesus Is Lord.

Jesus is Lord. You read verse 28 for yourself. It's astounding. Jesus says, *²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.*" It's a bombshell. This is a declaration of deity. Here is Jesus on the very front end of His ministry. Here is Jesus making a divine claim over a day. Here is Jesus claiming the divine right over the law. Here's Jesus saying, "I was there at Creation, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He was there. Jesus was there on Mt. Sinai, giving of the law. Jesus is saying, "I am the ruler of this day. I am the sovereign Lord of the Sabbath, the sovereign ruler of this day. I am the interpreter of God's will for this day. You don't set the standard of behavior on the Sabbath day, I do."

This is the truth claim that Jesus is God and He's worthy of your worship. He took the burden of every sin and He carried those sins to the cross. He died there for the burden on a Friday. Count the days out with me now. On a Saturday, He lay still. Saturday is the Sabbath, the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus kept the last and final Sabbath by laying still. But a new covenant comes on the Lord's Day. God raised Him from the dead on a Lord's Day, on a Sunday. God raised Him from the dead in victory and hope and grace, and smashed legalism. God raised Him from the dead on a Sunday and now He calls for all of you to come. By faith I'm asking you to enter into His rest this morning, to

come and unyoke yourself from all that other and take on your life the yoke of grace that is Christ. Come to Jesus. He doesn't enslave. He frees.

(Pastor prays)