

Lord of the Sabbath Rest.
Mark 2:23-28

Exodus 20:1-21

Romans 14:1-13

Responsive Matthew 11:25-30

Before we look at our passage for today I want go back and read last week because even though what we will see this week is a different event in the early ministry of Christ we will see that the effect here is really the same. So let us read Mark chapter 2:18-22. What we are starting to see here in these verses that record Jesus ministry around the sea of Galilee is a separation with Jesus being the catalyst for this change. Right from the start Jesus ministry basically had the effect of turning the religious leaders on their heads for what we see recorded here last week shows that he and his disciples had a different focus then those of the traditions of the Pharisee's who were the most influential religious group in Israel even though they were only about 1% of the population. This had a two fold effect on those around, 1st many marveled at him and the authority which is taught, and the healing of the sick and the casting out of demons. The 2nd effect that it had was that it angered the religious elite for he was taking their laws, and their traditions and in their mind was twisting and changing their meaning and purpose.

The reality is that Jesus is the Messiah, and all of these Laws and Traditions were put in place to instruct, and to prepare the way for him. They both pointed to our need of a savior, and to the person and nature of Christ. This is the reality that those who were his detractors had missed. The fulfilment of the prophecies, and one that the law was intended to teach us about had come. It was time to lay aside the shadows and to now cling to the substance. The Laws and traditions were holy, and right, but upon the arrival of Jesus, the promised seed, they had served their purpose. When I think about the Pharisees and the other religious groups in Israel at the time, and their response to Christ in many ways I don't really blame them.

In their minds they were doing what God had told them to do and it had been passed down for generations. They had missed the point that these laws and traditions were not the substance, but the shadow. But I don't find it surprising that they would act as they do seeing this man Jesus whom they know, born of a carpenter now claiming to be the promised Messiah. This is not the king they believe they have been waiting for, this is not the one who has come to release them from the Roman occupation and reestablish them as a sovereign nation. To them, he was an impostor, a blasphemer who was twisting the word of God and leading good Jews astray from the Torah. As we will see in our passage today is another example of Jesus taking a core central piece of the Jewish faith and seeming to utterly disregard it. Of course there is a reason and his purpose for doing so, as with all things, the calling of his disciples, the miracles and the casting out of demons it served a purpose. And that purpose was a gospel driven purpose. It was to point to Christ and his authority, to his power, his sovereignty over all things.

It was to show that this man, who was claiming to be the Messiah did not only come with words making bold claims. For anyone can do so, we have seen it all throughout history have we not? False prophets arise, they claim to be a chosen one, or messiah himself and yet were are they? Either dead, or in prison. But Jesus did not come with just smooth words as these false prophets and messiahs have, but he came both in word and in deed. His actions proved out his words, his actions served to show that he truly was who he claimed to be. Everything Christ did was for a purpose, and that purpose was to further the kingdom.

So just like we saw last week, where Christ turned the action of his disciples into an object lesson that shows that he is the true promised messiah. We see the same type of things again here in the following verses. (READ) Verse 23 to the end of the chapter.

So first before we can start unpacking this passage we need to understand a little about the Sabbath and the Jewish understanding of it. As we all know the Sabbath was a holy day that we set apart, to be venerated above all other days. Of all of their laws and traditions the Sabbath was one that was probably held with some of the most importance in the Jewish Faith, along with the circumcision. So now we see the one who is claiming to be their promised messiah, with his followers not observing this most holy of days in the way that they believe it should be held. The Sabbath, and the circumcision were 2 things that set Israel apart from other nations and religions. Sure, they had their temple, and places of worship but so did all the other nations and religions. So it is not hard to see why they would cling so hard and fast to these since it was what God had given them to set them apart.

One of the problems though was just like many things, even the practice of the sabbath had become corrupted, just like with everything it's purpose had been lost, and the practice of the sabbath itself was seen as the righteous act leading to holiness. The general rule of the Sabbath was that you were to not do any work from sunset Friday night, until Sunset Saturday night unless it was a work of necessity, which by necessity was understood to be life or death. The first 3 verses of Exodus chapter 35 is the account of Moses instructing Israel on the Sabbath that God had commanded. Verse 1."Then Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said tot hem, These are the words which the Lord has commanded you to do; Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day.

I want you to note a few things here, first is the seriousness of the punishment of the offense. Breaking the Sabbath was punishable by death. This shows the importance and as we will see is actually still in effect today. Also as we saw in our reading this morning, this Sabbath rest was extended not only to the people themselves, but to their slaves, their visitors, and even their animals. Second, notice that in God's command he says that the 7th day shall be a holy day for you, the significance of this we will see in our passage today. But just like most things, over the generations this Sabbath commandment had been added to and defined in such a way that there was to be no doubt or question as to what was, and what was not a work of necessity. Rules and Laws were set to facilitate the keeping of the Sabbath. The command to set the day apart, to keep it holy, to spend that time in worship, and focusing your heart and mind upon God had been turned into a rigid list of dos and don'ts. Many of these were things that are rather obvious, such as no working in the fields, no hunting but then added to it were things such as no tying or loosing knots, no sewing more then 1 stitch or writing more then 1 letter, and this carried even into defining what was considered to be works of necessity, or things of life and death.

It was forbidden to set a dislocated foot, or hand on the Sabbath, or to walk more then 1,999 paces and it was even forbidden to repair a fallen roof. if a roof collapsed trapping people inside. This would be considered a work of necessity, and they would be allowed to clear the rubble to see if there were any survivors, but any of those who were dead would be left until sunset on Saturday. These are just a few examples of the strict interpretation that these Pharisee's held of God's sabbath command. So here we find Jesus and his disciples not only walking through a field which may very well have been longer then a sabbaths day journey, we see that they were plucking the heads of the grain which was forbidden for it would have been considered to be working the field.

So it is interesting how Jesus answers the Pharisees when they start questioning the action of his disciples. Previously when asked about them not observing the time of fasting Jesus appeals to his own authority on the matter. He doesn't argue from scripture and just says that their observance of that fast is unnecessary now that he has come. But here, he appeals to scripture and recalls the account of David when he was an outlaw and hunted by King Saul. In desperation and hunger David entered the the tabernacle in search for food. This showbread that Jesus mentions here was the 12 loaves of bread that were placed on the alter every sabbath that was meant as food for the priests. It was unlawful for anyone other then the priests to eat this bread. Yet David and his men, broke into the tabernacle and did what was unlawful. David was considered to be the greatest king of Israel and it was through the lineage of David that the Messiah would come. Scripture points to David as being a precursor of the Messiah. And here, Jesus points to David, a venerated national hero, celebrated as being the greatest king and who was enshrined as being the inauguration of a future messianic reign that would be even more glorious than his historical reign. And he points to him doing that which is unlawful and forbidden.

Jesus is not using this account of David as some sort of excuse for his disciples doing what is unlawful, but instead he is drawing a direct comparison between himself and David. If David was the precursor to the messiah, in this invitation Jesus is implying that he himself is the messiah. If it was accepted as being necessary and ok for David and his men to eat the show bread how much more so should it be ok for the messiah and his followers to pluck some heads of grain on the Sabbath. But it goes further then that, and this is what hearkens back to what we read in Exodus. Verse 27. And he said tot hem, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Jesus here is clarifying the relationship between man and the Sabbath. At this point the practice of the sabbath had become a heavy burden upon the people, something that had been meant to be a holy day of rest and reflection had become a day heavy with rules, regulations and restrictions. In this instruction here, Jesus is taken this bloated wrong idea of the sabbath and correcting it, bringing the focus back to its original intent.

What is the sabbath and how it is defined now that the messiah has come becomes a very important point and an area of contention among some believers. There are many today who hold to a sabbath day, usually observed on Sunday. But really there is no real biblical support for such tradition. It is born out of a misunderstanding as to what the sabbath is. The sabbath day of rest that was commanded by God was more then just a physical day of the week, but pointed to something else which we see the fulfillment of it here in verse 28. "Therefor the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." Throughout all of the gospels, the phrase Son of Man is used only by Jesus himself and is usually a reference to either his present status, being in the flesh, being one born of a woman, or He uses it in reference to his future glory. Jesus was both the son of God, and the son of Man and this statement here is showing the duality of his nature. He is both, the son of man, and the Lord of the Sabbath.

Imagine you were a Pharisee, holding fast to a strict observance and understanding of the Sabbath which was a commandment given to them by God himself through moses. Then here stands Jesus, saying that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. God had instituted the Sabbath, and now Jesus has been given authority over it. This again puts Jesus as a direct equal to God. It is no wonder that these Pharisee's were seeking his death and believed him to be a blasphemer. Jesus has just claimed to have authority, and to be of more importance then their sabbath which as noted earlier was one of the main things that set Israel apart from the other nations and religions so it was deemed as one of the most important commandments given to them by God.

An interesting implication of these 2 verses is its effect on our understanding of the Law and the Gospel and the relationship between Jesus and the Torah. which are 2 things that is an area of contention in Christianity today. The 2 extremes of legalism, and antinomianism is avoided here because it argues against the practice of legalism which tends to replace the person of God with adherence to a moral code, as well as antinomianism because Jesus is not necessarily repealing the law or the will of God but rather he is saying that that the righteous purpose of God's law in the old testament can be fulfilled only in relation to Jesus Christ.

These same debates over the sabbath, what it is, and how it is kept still go on today. Our Reformed brethren see the law as something that is binding on the christian. To put it simply the idea is that now that we have been called into the fold of God, now that we have been born again we have the ability to keep god's law. Another view that is commonly found in protestant churches today flow from the dispensational camp which see the law as something that was given to Israel to make them a holy nation, to keep them right with God but in the end they did not keep it so God turned to the gentiles and offered a better way by sending his son creating a new dispensation of grace instead of the dispensation of law that is seen in the old testament.

I don't think that the bible actually supports either one of these views, the Reformed view leads to moralism, legalism and basically replaces the old mosaic laws with a new updated version, they traded one moral code for another. While the problem with the dispensational view is that it can come to close to teaching that there have been 2 ways to be right with God. For Israel it was by following his Law, or for us today by grace through the blood of Christ. The problem is that the entire bible teaches the only way to be right with God is by grace, through faith. Even Paul shows that Abraham was saved by grace, through faith 100s of years before the law. Grace, and faith operated before the law. So Paul argues that righteousness before God was never by keeping the law, it was only by faith. The law was to convict, it was to teach that no one is capable of being as good as God requires.

It was given to show that we need a savior, we need a messiah. Christ is the focal point of scripture, everything leading up to his birth was about him and prepared the way for his arrival. And everything since his death and resurrection has been about him and what he has done for us. So this idea that now that we have been saved we can keep the law I think is just as much as an error as the idea that we could be righteous and justified by keeping it. The law points to christ, and infact he fulfilled the law, as Paul wrote in Hebrews since there has now been a new covenant God has made the first obsolete. We do not need to go back to the moral code given to israel as our rule and guide for with the new covenant comes the holy spirit who works in the place of the physical moral code. The mosaic laws purpose was to guide, teach, and protect Israel, which is exactly what the entire new testament says is the role of the holy spirit.

So where does that leave the sabbath, what does the sabbath mean for us today. If the law is no longer binding, if we are now free in Christ who fulfilled the righteous requirements for us and imputed it to our account is this idea of a sabbath day binding to us? Well the answer is no. Many Christians today observe the sabbath on sundays, and there is nothing wrong with doing so if that is your conviction, but understand that it is not a biblcal requirement, it is a tradition, and nothing more. But that does not mean the sabbath doesn't exist, it does, but it has changed. It has gone from the picture, the shadow, the example which was the physical day set aside to rest and worship, to now its fulfillment which is found in Christ, who has he says here in mark. He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

So, now that brings up another question. If the sabbath is no longer a day that we must observe, yet the sabbath still exists..what is it, and how do we still observe it? Well, if we go to Hebrews chapter 3 we can find answer. (READ 3:1-11)

This does not sound like a specific day does it? Paul is talking about something completely different and he equates salvation as to entering the sabbath rest. Look at verse 16-4:3

Only those who believe upon him, only those who have faith will enter God's rest. Now you may think that this rest and the sabbath rest are something entirely different but if we continue on here in verse 4 we see that Paul equates the 2. 4-10.

The biblical view of the sabbath is not the keeping of a day set apart to rest, to restrain, or be restricted from things such as it was in the time of Moses. But rather that day of rest in the mosaic law was to point to this, its purpose was to point to our rest in Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. And this rest, just like that of the mosaic covenant comes with the same penalties. If you broke the sabbath according to what we read in Jeremiah, the penalty was death. That has not changed, if you are not in the sabbath rest of Christ, then the penalty is eternal death in hell. Christ is the lord of the sabbath, it is the fulfillment of the sabbath day picture. It is only in him that we find rest. So in closing I ask, Are you resting in this sabbath?