

Mark 2:23-3:6

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[0 : 00] Well, today we're going to be looking at the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 in Mark. And we've seen this series of confrontations that Mark records for us that Jesus had with the Pharisees.

And there are five of them. Typically, people would say things that way, but we're going to address the last two together because it's topical in that way. I hope you know that the chapter and verse numbers are not inspired in the Word of God.

And so, if you'll allow, I'm going to go from the end of 2 into the beginning of 3. So let's read together, beginning in verse 23, chapter 2. One Sabbath, he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

And the Pharisees were saying to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? 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, 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 priest to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him.

And he said to them, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath. Again, he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.

[1 : 22] And they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, come here. And he said to them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?

But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the great blessing of getting to be together here today, for the blessing of a community of faith, your church.

And we thank you for your word, which is a great gift to us as a guide for all holiness. And we thank you for your spirit, who works in us to understand what it is your word would communicate to us this day.

Both to know what it means and how to apply it to our living. And we pray, Father, by your spirit, that you will have your way with us this morning. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

[2 : 34] Amen. So we've seen the kind of the interaction so far through chapter 2 between the Pharisees, the Pharisees of the scribes, the scribes, these religious elite of the day, and Jesus.

And you begin to note as they're following him, there's a lot of record that the reason that they were following him was not to believe in him, but rather to accuse him. They were looking for accusations to stack up against him.

And you see that happening here again. We see them following him through the grain fields, asking him accusatory questions. Not honest questions, but questions seeking ways to accuse him.

We see it again in chapter 3, verse 2, right? They ask him again this question that they might accuse him. And then we see them immediately after this interaction in verse 6, going and conspiring with another sect of the Jews that were particularly kind to Herod called the Herodians to see how it is that they could destroy Jesus.

And their major point of accusation was that he was blaspheming, that he was saying he was God. And they were right. They caught at least that.

[3 : 46] He was in fact saying he was God. And it would have been blasphemy if Jesus himself wasn't in fact God. So you see this constant accusation being railed against him.

And here he does something incredibly shocking. Previously in chapter 2, verse 10, he has claimed that he has the power to forgive sin, which would have equated him with God.

Here he calls himself the Lord even of the Sabbath. This would have been a massive claim to make for them. And certainly he is.

John chapter 1, verses 1 through 3, my favorite account of Jesus coming into the world says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. He made the Sabbath. Colossians 1.16 furthers that.

[4 : 45] Paul writes, By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

And so he certainly is the Lord of the Sabbath. But in order to understand the shock that this kind of phrase would have been to them, we must first understand how the Pharisees viewed and how they kept the Sabbath.

It was certainly wrong the way that they did. A man named Alfred Eidersheim wrote a book called The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, which I did not read, but I gleaned a bunch of stuff from, in which he researches, studies the Talmud, which was an old document, came after the days of Jesus, but was written to sum up the laws that were being kept by the apostate Jews at this time.

And he brings some understanding to what the Sabbath meant for them. Now the Sabbath for them would have been celebrated from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. So this is the 24-hour period of time, and there were many, many laws that they had put in place.

The intent there was to prevent, originally, them from sinning at all, from breaking what the Sabbath was really meant for. But these new laws, called hedge laws, have become the new form of worship.

[6 : 08] As I said to you before, the Pharisees at this time numbered about 6,000 people among the millions that existed in this day. They were the religious elite, at least in their own minds, and they held a standard over everybody else.

So listen just to some of the things. This is just a few. In the Talmud, there are 24 chapters designated to this. One rabbi said he spent two and a half years trying to understand the minutiae of the laws that existed at this time.

So get this. You couldn't travel more than 3,000 feet. 3,000 feet. Some say you can't go more than 2,999 steps just in case you wouldn't take that last step and be found in sin.

No burden could be carried, so no weight could be picked up that weighed more than a dried fig. Or half a fig carried two times. It wasn't that lenient. If you put an olive in your mouth and rejected it because it was bad, you couldn't put another whole olive in the mouth because your palate had already tasted the flavor of the olive.

If you threw an object in the air and caught it with the other hand, it was a sin. If you caught it in the same hand, it wasn't. A tailor couldn't carry his needle.

[7 : 24] The scribe couldn't carry his pen. A pupil couldn't carry his books. Wool couldn't be dyed. Nothing could be sold. Nothing could be bought. Nothing could be washed.

No fire could be lit. Cold water could be poured on warm water, but warm couldn't be poured onto cold. I don't know why. You could not bathe for fear that when the water fell off of you, it might wash the floor, which would have been considered work.

If a candle was lit, you couldn't put it out. If it wasn't lit, you couldn't light it. Chairs couldn't be moved because they might make a rut.

They might dig into the ground. Women couldn't look in a glass, or they might find a white hair and be tempted to pull it out. Women couldn't wear jewelry because jewelry weighed more than a dried fig.

A radish couldn't be left in salt because it would make it pickle, and that's work. You could use only enough ink for two letters. Not letters written to somebody, but two letters.

[8 : 31] You could write your initials, I suppose. And these things like this go on and on and on and on for 24 chapters.

In the Talmud. Jesus said of the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23, verses 4 through 7, They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders.

But they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

Religious ornaments. And they love the place of honor at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplaces, and being called rabbi by others.

They had created this false, superficial religion that they wanted to bear on the outside, as Jesus called them, whitewashed tombs full of dead people's bones.

[9 : 30] And they lorded this over people. They themselves could not keep the Sabbath. Recall the way they prescribed it.

Recall that they could only travel 3,000 feet. But look, at the very beginning of our text, they're traveling through the grain fields. And who's following them? The Pharisees.

They accused the disciples of plucking heads of wheat in order to eat. Notice they don't accuse them of walking more than 3,000 steps.

Because they themselves were guilty of even that. Do we not have many amongst us that are pharisaical? We would do well as we contemplate the way they treated the Sabbath to see how it is that we are often pharisaical in other things.

Casting judgment where judgments not do. Now the Sabbath, as it was meant to be observed, was first instituted in Genesis 2, verses 1-3.

[10 : 34] Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. Because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in the creation. In Exodus chapter 20, beginning in verse 8, we can read, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. And on it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is in your gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. The Sabbath day in its entirety was meant to be a day where you did not work.

It's very common in this day to work every single day of the week. Again, trying to provide for yourself off the land, off the fruit of your own labor, and you work. God gave to them a day where they were to not work.

[11 : 45] In fact, where we get Sabbath, the original Hebrew word, simply means to cease. What this day was set apart from. To cease from work.

Why? Why did He do this? It was meant, firstly, as a mercy. To God's people. To rest. Rest is good for us.

Our bodies are frail, and they're failing. We need restorative rest. But primarily, primarily it was given to us as a reminder.

In Exodus chapter 31, verse 12 and 13, we see this record, and the Lord said to Moses, you are to speak to the people of Israel and say, above all you shall keep my Sabbaths.

For this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. It was meant to serve as a reminder in this way.

[12 : 43] A sign. A covenant sign. A wedding ring, if you will. Of a reminder of the relationship between God and His people. To what end? Right?

That I, the Lord, sanctify you. That it is my doing on your part to make you perfect. That you cannot achieve favor with God on your own.

But that I work in you to will and to work for my good pleasure. This is what the Sabbath was meant to represent for them. That they ceased laboring.

Both in the physical realm, but to remind them that by no effort of their own could they labor their way to God. This was a relationship wrought by Him in grace.

And therefore kept by Him in grace. Colossians 2, 16 and 17. We see some inspired commentary.

[13 : 43] Paul writes, 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. These are a shadow of the things to come.

But the substance belongs to Christ. So for the Jews, the Sabbath was meant to remind them of this reality and point them to the final work of Christ on the cross.

Who would come for them and spill His blood. Bear the wrath of God that they might have rest. See that further in Hebrews 4.

The writer of Hebrews beginning in verse 9 says, So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from His works as God did from His.

You see that connection for us? Remember when we studied Nehemiah recently in chapter 8, verse 31. One of the commitments that the people of God make as they hear the Word of God read to them and realize that they had sinned in forgetting the Sabbath was that they would protect that covenantal sign between them and God by keeping the Sabbath day.

[14 : 54] If you recall, I've said to you that this is when the Pharisees, this sect of Judaism actually began. Back in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Men who became committed to helping the Jewish people keep the Sabbath holy and oh how it was distorted across the next couple of hundred years.

He says in verse 27 of chapter 2, Jesus says, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. You see how it was meant to serve the people of God.

And He drives this point by telling a story, reminding them of the story of David. If you'd like to later, you can read about it in 1 Samuel chapter 21. And He says to them very sarcastically at the beginning because these people would have read.

He knew that answer. The Pharisees had read the Old Testament. They were very familiar with it. So when He says, Have you never read what David did? He's being tongue-in-cheek with them.

[15 : 56] When he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar, the high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him.

So what is the point of what he's saying with this example? Now if you read in 1 Samuel chapter 21, you will find that the encounter with David and the priest was not with the priest, Abiathar.

Don't be confused by that. This is a consistent book. The prominent high priest in this day was Abiathar. They would have known that as a timeline for them.

Jesus is marking off when it happened, not who David interacted with. He interacted instead with Abiathar's predecessor, Ahimelech. And he goes to him.

He's been driven out as the proper heir to the throne by Saul. He's been driven out of Israel, and he is gone, excuse me, Jerusalem, and he's hungry.

[16 : 54] He didn't have time to even take a weapon. In fact, if you read in here as he's looking for a weapon, Ahimelech just happens to have the spear of Goliath. He's got a knife stored away. And it's pretty cool.

This is the point at which David takes it back. He says, that weapon will do. There's no other weapon like it. I'll take that one. So he's driven out. He doesn't have food, and all of his accompaniment with him doesn't have a way to eat.

And so what he's offered here, as he asks for it, is the showbread. The bread of the presence is what that literally means. And this would have been twelve loaves that were set at a table in the temple of God.

And they were meant to represent that God was inviting the tribes of Israel to come and feast with Him. That's what these things represented. And they were replaced every seven days.

The old bread was taken out. New, hot, warm bread was brought back in on the Sabbath. This was the day that this took place. And that food was given to the priests.

[17 : 53] They were allowed to eat it, but it was unlawful for others to eat that bread that was given to David and his company. It's likely that this was actually the Sabbath day, which is a really neat connection to what we're talking about here.

As we see the disciples walking through fields and picking heads of grain, which was a lawful thing for them to do. They were allowed to do that. The sojourner was allowed to gather. We think of roads.

If you think of driving through wheat fields in the Midwest, we'd have a road and then some ditches and then a fence. Not so here. These would have just been paths that would have crisscrossed these wheat fields. And so as they're traveling from one place to another and were hungry, the sojourner was allowed to pick heads.

You certainly weren't allowed to go out and start harvesting somebody else's wheat, but what you could gather with your hands and eat as you went was permissible for you. So it's a higher thing. It's a more atrocious thing that David and his men were doing versus what they're being accused of doing here on the Sabbath.

That more than likely on the Sabbath in David's day, they took a bread that was forbidden for them to eat. The high priest gave it to them. In Matthew 12, reading of the same account, verses 5-8, Jesus says, Think about that.

[19 : 33] They had created hedge laws that would have prevented the priests from doing their priestly duty on the Sabbath. They couldn't lift anything, right?

One dried fig or half a fig twice. That's what they were permitted to lift. The very work that was being done by the priests of God was wrong in the Pharisees' mind.

The point that he makes for us in Matthew 12. And so see what he goes on to say in Matthew 12, verse 7, And if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

You would not have condemned the guiltless. He cares about the heart of the matter more than the outward appearance of it. Right? The Sabbath itself was meant to be a reminder of the mercy of God to His people.

And He wants them then to practice mercy on the Sabbath. Not to disregard it and replace it with some hypocritical law, some details, some outward appearances that would make somebody appear righteous, but He wanted them to actually be righteous.

[20 : 48] And so that's what's going on here. That's what the questioning is being asked. The Sabbath served man as the covenant side of God's mercy to His people. And the reason we're treating this text together going into chapter 3 is whether or not it happened back to back.

I'm presuming that it did. But Mark certainly recorded it for us back to back because I think this next incident was a test of what he had just taught the Pharisees at the end of chapter 2.

The things he has just said to them, he then goes into the temple and notice that he sees a man with a withered hand. He knows that they're standing around to accuse him.

He brings the man to him. Verse 3, he says, come here. And he said to them, to the Pharisees, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent.

And he looked around at them with anger. And I think the reason he was angry is because he was trying to teach them this lesson and they were missing it. And then he grieved. Great grief over their hardness of heart.

[21 : 56] So this lesson that he's been trying to teach them, they missed it all together. The same record of this account in Matthew 12 from verse 9-12 says, He went on from there and entered the synagogue.

And a man was there with a withered hand and they asked him, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him? And here's his response as recorded in Matthew. He said to them, Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?

So this is Pharisaical people, Which of you will not do some work if one of your poor sheep falls into a pit? In verse 12 he says, Of how much more value is a man than a sheep?

So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Jesus came to fulfill the law. Not abolish it, to fulfill it, but to fulfill it in the proper way, the way in which it was set out.

So he came to deliver mercy on the Sabbath day, to see it for what it was meant for, to know that it was made for man and not the other way around.

[23 : 07] And that's the great problem with Phariseeism or legalism, fundamentalism, various terms that would be applied to this type of heart. Legalism says, for you to be accepted by God, you must look like me.

But the gospel of Christ says, you have been accepted by God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and by grace, He is conforming you into His image.

This must be true for those of us who are found in Christ. We will live properly. We will display mercy. But it's not the other way around.

We cannot work our way to heavenly favor. This is impossible. Our work is simply the evidence of the heavenly favor we have already received.

And this was the message that Jesus was trying to get across to the Pharisees. Remember, He came to preach the Gospel. Chapter 1, verse 15, And the kingdom of God is at hand.

[24 : 14] Repent and believe in the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. This is what has been granted to us, I hope, for everyone in this room.

But we really need to search out our hearts and find the ways in which we are legalists. And this happens a lot. Churches at Broad, there are many, many, many churches that this Sunday morning if I were not wearing a tie and a jacket, I'd be found unacceptable.

Not just from a personal preference, which is fine. It's okay if people like a guy who wears a tie, they take him more seriously. It's okay. But they would actually find me unacceptable before God that I would dare enter a church building not wearing a tie.

Phariseeism. Extra laws. Things stacked on top. Simply trying to get at the heart of things. People just want to see somebody be reverent before God.

That's a good motivation and we should. But when it becomes about mere trappings on the outside, we've missed the point. We've missed the point all together.

[25 : 29] And so this morning, as we begin to take the Lord's Supper together, I want to do things a little bit differently. And I want to ask you to take some time to remove the log from your own eye so that you can remove the speck from others.

It is so easy when we read about these men to project the fault and the wrong that's happening here on the world around us. I want to do this.

I am so tempted to say, Christ Family Church has got it all figured out. We are doing well. And then point my finger at every other church out there. As you've heard me say before, we have our own 95 theses we can nail on our door.

Stick it with a magnet. Right? There are faults within our church. There are ways in which we are saying to people for you to be accepted by God, you must look like me.

And this is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, men, if you were asked to help serve the Lord's Supper, let me just ask that you go ahead and go back and get the elements for the Lord's Supper.

[26 : 29] I want to read to you some more of Colossians 1. We read a bit beginning in verse 15. But turn with me, please, to Colossians 1.

Verse 15. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

All things were created through Him and for Him. And here's where we keep going. And He is before all things, preeminent. And in Him all things hold together.

and He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

and you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, He is now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him.

[27 : 43] You see in this text this completed work of Christ on the cross. And that's what we celebrate together in the Lord's Supper. Not that we might labor together under our own power, that we might rejoice, find great joy in the work that He has completed and is completing in us.

And I hope that contemplating this and thinking through this makes you motivated to share this gospel with the world. Let's pray together and then have the men come and you take the Lord's Supper as you feel prepared.