

# Lord of the Sabbath

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Last week we looked at verses 18 through 22 in chapter 2 of the Gospel of Mark. And we saw Jesus in that passage begin to create a stir over the fact that unlike the other! Jewish religious leaders of the day, Jesus did not require His disciples to fast.

The Pharisees fasted regularly. The disciples of John, Jesus' own cousin, fasted regularly. Secondly, we would assume that every religious Jew of that time, whether they were a Pharisee or a Sadducee or something else like one of John's disciples, they all fasted regularly and yet Jesus, He doesn't require His disciples to fast. In fact, Jesus says in that passage that so long as He is with them, physically present with His disciples, they cannot fast.

It's impossible for them to fast. But of course, most of the people who heard Jesus say that didn't understand what He was getting at. Their minds sort of remained firmly fixed on the things that they were familiar with, the things that they already knew. But Jesus was here to bring in something new, something different. Jesus came to bring in the kingdom of God. He came to usher in the age of the new covenant. And here He was talking to people and dealing with people who didn't really understand what the kingdom of God was. They were living under an administration that was passing away, the old covenant. And Jesus came to bring something better than the old covenant.

But I told you last week, and I want to kind of reiterate this week, that I think that we would be wrong if we thought that the fact that the new covenant is better than the old covenant, if we thought that that meant that there was something wrong with the old covenant.

We would be wrong if we thought that the old covenant, that the law of Moses, all of those laws and rules and regulations that we find in the Old Testament, if we thought that those were somehow bad or evil or contrary to what God really wants to do, we would be mistaken.

[ 2 : 0 8 ] The new covenant is good. The new covenant is better than the old covenant, but the old covenant is not bad. In fact, the apostle Paul, he warns us against having that kind of mentality in his letter to the Galatians. In Galatians chapter 3 verse 21, he asks a question. He says, is the law, that's the regulations of the old covenant, he says, is the law contrary to the promises of God?

That's the promises of the new covenant that Jesus came to fulfill. He says, are those things contradictory? Is the law contrary to the gospel? Is the law contrary to the promises of the new covenant? And Paul answers by saying, certainly not. For if a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness, he says, would have been by the law. In other words, what Paul teaches us is that the problem is not with the law. There's nothing wrong with the law of God. There's nothing wrong with the law of Moses. The problem is with sinners. Because we're spiritually dead. We can't obey the law.

And the law was never designed to give us spiritual life. All the law does is show us that we are dead, but it doesn't save us. It doesn't give us life. It can't give us life. And the problem of the religious leaders of Jesus' day was not that they trusted in the old covenant. It wasn't that they were faithful to the old covenant. It's that they didn't understand the scriptures and they didn't long for the things that the old covenant itself and the prophets of the old covenant pointed toward. You see, these people that Jesus is dealing with here, they thought that by obeying the law, they could somehow earn life.

Now, put yourself in their position for a little bit. If you really believed that all of eternity hanged and all of God's blessings were hanging upon your obedience to a set of rules, wouldn't you do everything in your power to make sure that you and the people that you loved didn't do anything at all to violate those rules? Wouldn't you probably make other rules to surround those rules to make sure that nobody ever got close to even breaking those actual rules?

So that, for instance, if you really believed, okay, if you really believed that the only way you were ever going to get to heaven is if you woke up every morning by six o'clock in the morning, that's the only way you could get to heaven, you'd probably set your alarm for five o'clock in the morning just to make sure that in case you hit the snooze button a couple of times, you never got too close to that six o'clock hour and then all is lost. Well, that's exactly what the Pharisees did.

[ 5 : 03 ] They added laws to the law of God and they surrounded it so that they never came close to actually breaking the law. So the law required them to rest on the Sabbath day, on Saturdays. So they made all sorts of rules around it to define what qualified as work, what might be work, because we don't want anyone to accidentally work and violate the Sabbath and break the law of God and then they're in serious, serious trouble. And so they made all these laws surrounding the Sabbath day, all these rules and regulations. The problem with that is, is that when you pass those rules and regulations on to the next generation and they pass it on to the next generation, pretty soon those rules become set in stone and they become just as binding in the minds of people as the original actual law itself. And that's exactly what's happened here. In this passage that we're looking at tonight, Mark tells us about two different conflicts that Jesus has with the Pharisees over the Sabbath law. Now, Jesus could have done what he sometimes does when he has conflicts with the Pharisees and other religious leaders about all those sort of unbiblical add-ons to the law. He could have chided them. He could have told them about how unbiblical their extra rules were, and he does that in other times, but he doesn't do that here. Right here, he chooses instead to just go ahead and aim for the heart, just get to the core root issue that separates him from the religious leaders of his day, and really probably of our day too, of every day.

So, in the first instance, Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees because he allows his disciples, as they're walking along on the Sabbath day, he allows them to pluck the heads of grain out of a field, which is perfectly legal according to the law. The law of Moses allows a person to pluck grains from someone else's field. It's not considered theft. It's not considered stealing.

Something specifically laid out, they're allowed to do that. The problem is that Jesus allows his disciples to do that on the Sabbath. So, as they're walking along, they pluck the heads of grain. They would rub them together in their hands to get rid of the chaff and everything else, and then they'd have something to eat. And we're told that the Pharisees objected to that. Take a look at verse 23.

It tells us exactly what happened. One Sabbath, he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. Pretty simple. Verse 24 tells us how the Pharisees reacted. It says, And the Pharisees were saying to him, Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?

Jesus could have argued with the Pharisees about whether or not what his disciples were doing was technically a violation of the law. Because the law tells us that you can't harvest. Exodus 24 verse 31 says that the Jews are supposed to stop all harvesting. Take a break from your harvesting of your crops on the Sabbath day. But honestly, if you have a fruit tree in your backyard, if you have an apple tree in your backyard, and you go out back and you grab an apple off and go back in the house and eat your apple, or if you have a couple people with you and they grab an apple off the tree and you go back in your house, I mean, honestly, can anybody accuse you of harvesting apples? I mean, it's kind of ridiculous here.

[ 8 : 44 ] All right? Jesus could have argued the point. Well, it's not harvesting a couple of handfuls of, you know, grain and it's not a big deal. But he doesn't do that at all. In fact, Jesus doesn't dispute that his disciples may be breaking the law. He doesn't even dispute that.

Instead, he decides to go beneath the surface of the law to get to the heart of the matter, to try to get these Pharisees to understand the spirit of the law, the true intent of the law.

And to do that, he cites another part of the Old Testament. Look at verses 25 and 26. And he, Jesus, 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 is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him.

Now, that's probably a story that you're not all that familiar with. All right? I had to go back and reread it and get it fixed in my mind. But it comes from 1 Samuel chapter 21. It's a time when David was on the run from King Saul. King Saul wants to kill David, and David's on the run from him. And the story tells us that David went to the house of God, not the temple. The temple's not yet built, but to a place where the priests were operating and sacrifices were being made on a regular basis. And David went there and he requested some bread from one of the priests. And the priest gave him bread that had been specifically set aside as an offering to God. In fact, the law specifically says the only people who can eat that bread bread is the priest and his family. And they can only eat that bread after it has been out for a certain period of time as the bread of the presence or the show bread. And so David breaks the law here.

[ 10 : 51 ] The priest breaks the law because the priest gives David the bread that David can't eat. And even if David were from the priestly line, it's not time to eat the bread. So the priest breaks the law.

David breaks the law. And yet when you read the story, neither one of them ever gets in any kind of trouble for what they did. We see that kind of stuff happening all the time in the Old Testament.

We see, for instance, the ninth commandment tells us not to lie or bear false witness. But what did Rahab do? Do you remember the story of Rahab? When the spies came into Jericho, into the promised land, and she hides them in her home. And when the men of Jericho came looking for these spies, she just lied. She just straight up lied to them. I don't know. No, they're not here.

I haven't seen these guys. They're not around. It's a total lie. And yet she's blessed for that. She's blessed for what she did. God protects her for what she did. Why? Because in that particular instance, caring for these men and protecting the covenant people of God, in that instance, matters more than fulfilling the letter of the law. It's just more important.

And Jesus is trying to get these religious leaders to think the way that the writers of the Old Testament think. I mean, you would do the same sort of thing. Imagine if a murderer came to you and they're a well-known, they're a known murderer, and they knock on your door and you answer the door and your kids are playing in the back and they say, where are your children? You'd lie. I don't know. I hadn't seen them all day. They're gone. You'd lie. And you wouldn't feel guilty about it at all. You see, the whole point that Jesus is trying to make in telling the story is to show that the law of God should not be treated like just any sort of legal document. There are times when the letter of the law has to be ignored in order for the spirit of the law to be fulfilled. And that's not a New Testament concept. It's all over the Old Testament.

[ 13 : 00 ] The real secret is knowing when and why the letter of the law could be violated. It's knowing the true intention of the law. It's knowing the spirit of the law. And so Jesus, when it comes to the Sabbath, He tells these Pharisees what the intention of the law is. Verse 27, He says, And He said to them, In other words, God gave the Sabbath to Israel for their own benefit. It was supposed to be a day of resting from all their work that they'd been doing throughout the week. It was supposed to be a day for them to recuperate and recharge for the days that were ahead. It was supposed to be a day when they could set everything else aside and look ahead to the day when they would enjoy ultimate, final, eternal rest in the presence of God. But instead, these religious leaders had turned the Sabbath into a chore. So everyone had to make sure that they didn't walk too far. If you walk too far, that's work. Make sure that you don't lift too much, because if you lift too much, that's work. The Sabbath had become a burden rather than a burden lifter. And it's that kind of misunderstanding of the Sabbath that leads the Pharisees here to condemn Jesus' disciples for just plucking heads of grain.

They were hungry, just like David was hungry. And the Sabbath was created to meet man's need for rest. So you violate the Sabbath when you turn it into an excuse for depriving a man of one of his other basic needs for life.

They were hungry. They needed food. And just as David violated the law, so technically maybe they violated the law. But the Sabbath is about blessing man. It's about helping man. And they've turned it into the exact opposite.

We read these kind of stories, and we look at the Pharisees, and we just shake our heads at them, and we wonder, how could they be so thick-headed? But I think the truth is, we're the same way a lot of times.

[ 15 : 23 ] I mean, sometimes we turn Sunday into the most stressful day of the week, because we're trying to get things ready in time, and trying to get to church on time, and trying to do this and that, and get everybody dressed.

We turn it into one of the most stressful days of the week, when it's supposed to be a time of joyful fellowship and worship. Or how about our kids? Sometimes we work so hard to keep our kids sort of on the right path, and out of trouble, that we end up piling up rules on top of rules, until they're miserable.

Stop and ask ourselves the question, why? Why were we making these rules in the first place? Because we know that serving God and doing the right thing will bring them far more joy than going the way of the world.

We know that. And we want to maximize our kids' joy in Christ. But what we end up doing is piling up rules on top of rules, because we just want them to behave. We just want them to be quiet for a little while.

And we pile up these rules, and we steal joy with just endless demands. Maybe that's why Paul, this is one of the verses that runs through my head all the time.

[ 16 : 38 ] Paul told fathers, Do not provoke your children to anger or to wrath, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. I mean, yes, we discipline.

Yes, we teach. But we shouldn't do it in a way that provokes them, that stirs up anger in them. The whole point of discipline and instruction is, as I said, to maximize our children's joy in Christ.

Not to tear them down, not to make them angry and frustrated and resentful. But we do that. I mean, I do that because sometimes I just want obedience in the moment. I just want the letter of the law to be met more than the actual goal of pointing my kids to Christ and the joy to be had in Him.

We do that kind of stuff all the time. Jesus comes back and He says, The Sabbath was made for men, not men for the Sabbath. Now, the Pharisees obviously don't get the point because in just the next story, in the next chapter, in chapter 3, there's another run-in that they have with Jesus over the same basic issue.

Now, I'm not really sure in chapter 2, the story that we're looking at, I'm not sure why the Pharisees were out there near the grain fields where Jesus and His disciples were walking. It might have been a coincidence.

[ 17 : 55 ] It might have just been a common, you know, route, pathway to get somewhere. Or it might have been calculated. It might have been a setup.

I don't know about chapter 2, but in chapter 3, we know it's a setup. Take a look at verse 1. It says, Again, He, Jesus, entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.

And they watched Jesus to see whether He would heal Him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. They're like hungry lions waiting for Jesus to walk into their trap.

They're watching. It's a setup. And I don't think that there's any doubt in their minds as to what Jesus is going to do. Jesus, He's a healer. He heals people.

He helps those who are in need. That's what He does. They know it, and He doesn't disappoint them here. Verse 2, He said to the man with the withered hand, Come here.

[ 18 : 57 ] I can almost picture the Pharisees over in the corner just rubbing their hands together. Got Him now. He's going to do it. He's going to heal this guy, and then he'll be guilty of working because that's his thing.

He's a healer. He'll be guilty, and we'll have Him. We've got Him. But then Jesus does something unexpected. He's going to heal the guy, but He doesn't do it immediately. Instead, He turns, and He says something to these would-be accusers.

Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill? In the last conflict that He had with these guys over the Sabbath, they failed in their understanding of the Sabbath because they hadn't considered all of Scripture.

They're just considering the one law. They weren't considering how the rest of the Old Testament deals with that law and other ones just like it. So Jesus took the time. He refers back to the story in 1 Samuel chapter 21.

He took the time to show them the true intent and heart of the law, show them that that's what matters, not the letter. He just showed it to them there. This time, though, He gives them a chance to sort of realize that for themselves.

[ 20 : 15 ] I mean, the question that He asks them, it's a pretty easy question to answer. And even if they're not good on the spot at thinking up answers, the prophet Isaiah has already answered that question.

I want you to hold your spot in Mark chapter 3, but turn over to Isaiah chapter 56. You have to remember that the Old Testament prophets from Isaiah to the end of the Old Testament.

Those are the prophets. The Old Testament prophets, one of the things that they're primarily doing is interpreting the law of Moses for the people. That's one of their jobs.

And in Isaiah 56 in verse 1, this is what we read. Isaiah says, Thus says the Lord, Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come and my righteousness be revealed.

Blessed is the man who does this and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

[ 21 : 17 ] I mean, the Sabbath is not about walking too far or avoiding plucking grains or avoiding exerting yourself too much. It's about keeping justice, doing righteousness, and keeping yourself free from evil.

That's what Isaiah says. And these men should have known that. But Mark tells us they were silent. They didn't say anything. By the way, don't ever do that.

Don't ever say nothing or do nothing when you know what's right. Because it makes Jesus angry. Look at verse 5 in Mark chapter 2.

Turn back over. It says that He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart. Have you ever paused to consider what sorts of things might make Jesus angry?

Because He actually gets mad quite a bit in the Gospels during His earthly ministry. I mean, that old turning over the tables thing with the money changers in the temple, that's not like a one-time occurrence.

[ 22 : 20 ] Jesus didn't just lose His cool that day. Jesus routinely gets angry when religious people don't do what's right. When they play the hypocrite, it makes Him mad.

He's mad about it. But He's not just angry here. Mark tells us that He's grieved at their hardness of heart. The root word that's translated grieved means to be sorrowful.

But here that root word is intensified. So Mark's not telling us that Jesus was disappointed in them.

He's not a little bit upset with them. Mark's telling us that Jesus is deeply, genuinely saddened by the state of these people's hearts. They are so focused on external righteousness, on checking off all the right boxes, that they can't even see real, genuine righteousness.

It's like people who are a man who is so determined not to cross the street before the signal changes, that he stands as a woman as being assaulted on the other side of the street. And then He looks with disgust at the other man who runs across the street in violation of the street signal to rescue the woman.

[ 23 : 38 ] That's the exact same kind of situation that we're dealing with here. And Jesus is the man who just stands there and doesn't do what's right. The man who gets mad at the one who does the right thing because he's obeying the letter of the law.

It grieves the heart of Jesus. It just grieves Him. What a sad thing that we would do that.

Jesus never did that sort of thing. Jesus wasn't so obsessed with what everyone else thought about Him. and with outwardly obeying every rule and regulation that He failed to do the obviously right thing.

I mean, this is the one of whom Paul says He knew no sin. The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

So that this sinless, spotless Savior of the world never fretted over His reputation. He never worried about whether or not everyone else thought that He was righteous.

[ 24 : 48 ] It just wasn't the issue. Take a look at what happens at the end of this passage. He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and He said to the man, Stretch out your hand.

He stretched it out. His hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Him how to destroy Him.

Jesus just incited these people to hate Him. And now they're going to devote themselves to His destruction. And He doesn't even seem to really care. It just doesn't bother Him.

They take counsel with the Herodians. I mean, these are religious leaders. Their authority only goes so far. But now they're teaming up with the Herodians, the ones who have the right by Roman rule to actually do something to Jesus.

He just doesn't seem to... He just doesn't care. What's the secret to that kind of boldness? I mean, how do you become that kind of person?

[ 25 : 49 ] I think there's two things. I think the first thing is that you have to be confident in your own righteousness. Now, right there, most of you are probably going to go, whoa, stop.

I'm not righteous. The Bible says there's no one righteous. No, not one. How can we be confident in our righteousness? Because you have a righteousness that is not your own.

But you can own it as your own. You see, Christ, who knew no sin, we sang these words earlier. He became sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

So that His perfection can be counted as ours. His righteousness can be a covering for us. The Scriptures tell us that if we stop trusting in ourselves and we start trusting in Christ alone, then we'll be justified by God.

We will be counted righteous in His courtroom. To be confident in your own righteousness, you have to receive that righteousness as a gift.

[ 26 : 58 ] And you have to know that it never really was your own righteousness. At the end of the day, it's really being confident in Christ. Knowing who He is.

Knowing what He's done for you. And Jesus tells us as much in this passage. The Pharisees just didn't get it. Look back up in chapter 2.

End of chapter 2, verse 28. Jesus actually gives two reasons why it was okay for His disciples to pluck grains. First one's what we talked about. Spirit of the law.

Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. But right after that, He gives a second reason why it's okay. The second reason is this. So, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Now, I think there's two layers of meaning in that statement. Because the phrase Son of Man is used a lot of times just to refer to human beings. It's just a way of referring to mankind.

[ 27 : 58 ] Even in the passage we read earlier, Isaiah 56, Blessed is the man who does this, the Son of Man who holds it fast, keeping the Sabbath. Son of Man, man, mean the same thing in that passage. So a lot of times the phrase Son of Man just refers to just human beings.

So, in one sense, Jesus is saying that well, man is over the Sabbath, Sabbath not over the man. It's just another way of saying it. But there's another layer of meaning that I think we're supposed to see here that Mark intends for us to see and Jesus intends for us to see.

Because in the Old Testament the phrase Son of Man also becomes a way of referring to the Messiah, to the Christ. It's a way of showing that the Messiah would identify with humanity and even be a part of humanity.

So that the prophet Daniel spoke of one like a Son of Man who would come on the clouds. And in fact, this little term, Son of Man, is Jesus' favorite title for himself in the Gospels.

He refers to himself as Son of Man more than anything else. More than he refers to himself as Son of God. More than he refers to himself as the Christ. He refers to himself as Son of Man more than any other.

[ 29 : 07 ] And this is his point. He's saying to these people, I'm the Son of Man. I'm the Messiah. I'm the divine human King of Israel. I invented the Sabbath.

Don't try to tell me what the Sabbath is all about. I made it up. It's my idea. I rested on the seventh day. Don't tell me. I'm Lord of the Sabbath.

It's mine. The main problem with the Pharisees and all the other religious leaders during Jesus' day, I don't think their main problem was legalism.

I don't think their main problem was judgmentalism or hypocrisy. I mean, all those things can be forgiven. I've been a legalist before. I've been judgmental. I've been a hypocrite. And all of those things have been forgiven in Christ.

All those things can be forgiven. That's not their main issue. Their main issue is that they fail to understand who Jesus is and what He came to do. That's everybody's main problem.

[ 30 : 09 ] The problem of our society is not legalism or licentiousness. It's not either of those. The problem is that people don't know Christ and don't trust in Christ. They've heard about Him.

They may have read about Him. They may think that they know Him. But they don't know Him and they don't trust in Him. So the churches are filled with people who don't know Jesus.

The marketplace, the world, is filled with people who don't know Jesus. But we, we're supposed to be the people who know Him. We've received His righteousness by faith.

We have to learn to trust in that righteousness. We have to learn to be confident in the righteousness of Jesus that's been given to us if we want to have the kind of boldness that Jesus has.

When you're confident that His righteousness is mine, it doesn't matter what somebody else thinks. They can think that I'm the biggest lowlife on the face of the earth and I'll stand before God covered in the perfect righteousness of Jesus.

[ 31 : 14 ] It doesn't matter. But there's something else, the second thing that I think we need if we want to be confident the way that Jesus is.

And I think this is where the Pharisees fail time and time again. We need to, we need to really know and understand the Word of God.

I mean, the Pharisees, they had it memorized. They could quote it left and right, but they didn't know the Word of God. Because over and over in the Gospels, Jesus says to them, have you not read?

Do you not know? And then He quotes the Old Testament. They don't know it. We need to, we need to know it. We need to listen to the Spirit as we study and pray for understanding so that we don't make the mistake of elevating the letter above the Spirit so that we get what it's really all about.

And when we become those kinds of people, when we're confident in Christ and when we know His Word, then I think we will become the kind of effective servants of Jesus that we want to be.

[ 32 : 27 ] We'll honor Him at work. We'll honor Him at home. We'll put Him on display for our kids and our family members and our friends. And then we will finally become the kind of effective God-glorifying witnesses to the Gospel that we long to be.

Let's pray. Amen.