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Galilean Ministry Part 12

Mark 2:23-28 (Mt.12:1-8, Lk.6:1-5) 2/3/2018

Summary: The Pharisees accuse the disciples of Sabbath breaking when they pick grain while traveling. Jesus responds by pointing to David eating the bread of the presence. That was fitting because of the purpose of that symbolic law (God’s care for the people). So in deciding how to interpret the Sabbath law and what counts as work, we must consider the purpose of the law (refreshment, not burden). All laws are for man. Secondly, David was given an exception because he was exceptional – the most important person in the Old Testament. Jesus places himself in that same category, and even greater by claiming to be the Son of Man and the Lord of the Sabbath.

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Mark 2:23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” 25 He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” 27 Then 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.”

The Accusation: Sabbath Breaking

Mark 2:23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields

Jesus is travelling somewhere on the Sabbath day. The “roads” around Galilee were mostly walking paths that went through the fields. That’s a problem, because according to the rabbinic law, you could only walk 1999 total steps on the Sabbath day, because travelling was forbidden.

Mark 2:23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.¹

That's another problem. Any kind of harvesting or farming was strictly prohibited on the Sabbath. But the disciples are hungry,² McDavid's was closed on the Sabbath, so they grab some heads of grain as they walk. And guess who happens to see this.

24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful

What are the Pharisees doing in middle of the wheat field on the Sabbath? The disciples are just walking along, they grab a little grain, and suddenly these Pharisees pop out from behind the wheat stalks: "Ah ha! We caught you farming on the Sabbath!" What are the Pharisees doing out there?

In John's gospel we find out that Jesus had gone down to Jerusalem and healed an invalid on the Sabbath, and it turned into a huge conflict with the Pharisees.³ Jesus deliberately goes down to Judea, right into Jerusalem, right into the hornets' nest, and smacks the nest with a big ol' stick. And the hornets come flying out of the nest and go on the attack. And they follow Jesus back up to Galilee (Jn.5:15). They were dogging Jesus' steps, watching for him to do something wrong.

24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

The Sabbath Law

That is a very, very serious accusation. The Sabbath was one of the Ten Commandments.⁴ And God brings it up numerous other times, like in Ex.31.

Exodus 31:14 " 'Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. 15 For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. 16 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. 17 It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.' "

Twice he lays down the death penalty for anyone who works on the Sabbath. So this is a very serious accusation. If you're living in ancient Israel, you don't ever want to be guilty of violating the Sabbath, or your life is over.

What Counts as a Violation?

So that raises the question – what counts as a violation?

¹ They didn't have restaurants back then, so God put a provision in the law for people who were traveling.

Deuteronomy 23:25 If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick heads of grain with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.

You can't harvest someone else's crop, obviously, but it was perfectly ok to just pick some with your hands so you could have something to eat as you traveled.

² I have done this – when we lived in rural Oklahoma, and I can tell you – you would have to be awfully hungry to do this for a meal. It's a very difficult process to get the grain out of the husk, and when you finally do, it's not even a little bit tasty. So they must have been pretty hungry, which is exactly what Matthew says in the parallel account. They really needed some food.

Jesus had the ability to create bread, and we'll see him do that a couple times later on in the book, but here he just lets his disciples be hungry. Jesus' miracles were for specific purposes; he didn't just do them to avoid work or the normal hardships of life.

³ John 5.

⁴ And it's by far the longest. God devotes about 100 words to that commandment, compared to the first commandment, which is 8 words.

Put yourself in their shoes. There was a guy in Nm.15 who got caught gathering wood on the Sabbath and God commanded that he be stoned to death. If God threatens to put you to death if you work on Saturday, wouldn't you want to be really clear on the definition of work? And if some activity were questionable, wouldn't you want to err on the side of caution, so you don't even come anywhere close to violating the Sabbath?

So did God give any specifics about what he meant by "work"? Yes. You were to cease your normal work – not even animals were to work. No buying and selling, no carrying a load, no lighting a fire, no gathering wood. Scripture mentions each of those examples.⁵

What counts as carrying a load? What counts as farming? The rabbis debated those questions endlessly, and came up with some 1500 specific rules divided into 39 categories of forbidden activities.

A few examples to give you an idea: You couldn't do any cleaning. So you couldn't take a bath, because you might drip on the floor and you'd be guilty of washing the floor. You couldn't drag a chair because the legs would make little ruts, which is like plowing. So you would be guilty of farming on the Sabbath. And a load is defined as anything that weighs more than a dried fig. Women couldn't wear jewelry because it weighed more than dried fig. You couldn't wear dentures on the Sabbath, because that's a load. You couldn't put any more grain in your hand than would fit in a lamb's mouth. You could only carry enough ink for 2 letters of the alphabet – 2 characters. If it was almost Sabbath, and you were picking up food, and suddenly it was Sabbath had to drop food before you drew your arm back. If you threw an object and caught it with the same hand, that's fine, but if you catch it with the opposite hand, that's a violation. You couldn't blow out a candle. You couldn't tie a knot. You couldn't leave a radish in salt because it would become a pickle and that's food preparation. A woman couldn't look in mirror because she might find a gray hair and be tempted to pluck it out. It goes on endlessly about grain, wine, honey, milk, spitting (could spit into a rag but not on the ground, because that's irrigation, and now you're farming again). You could stop a man from dying but you could not help him get better. You could put a bandage on but not a medicated one. You could only walk 1999 steps.

Now, we laugh at all that, but think about it. What would you do if God told you, "If you do any work on a Saturday you will die"? You'd want to be extra sure you weren't doing any work, right? So their traditions may not be quite as crazy as they sound.

They wanted to take the law of God seriously – that's what the Pharisee movement was all about. And that was a good thing, not a bad thing. The problem with the Pharisees was not that they took the law of God too seriously. It's impossible to take God's Word too seriously. The problem with the Pharisees was their method of interpreting the law.

And what Jesus does here is two things. First, he teaches the right way to interpret laws like the Sabbath law. And then he pulls back the veil a little farther and shows us yet another magnificent aspect of his glory. So even if you learn nothing about the Sabbath or the law tonight, it will still be worth it because of what we're going to see of what Jesus revealed about himself.

Answer #1: Laws are FOR You

So let's take a look at Jesus answer. It's definitely not an answer they were expecting. The Pharisees were used to debating Sabbath rule exceptions. They did that all day long. They loved sitting around sparring over whether some obtuse, unusual thing would be a violation, or if it's an allowable exception. Not only did they have hundreds and hundreds of rules, but they had even more exceptions to rules.

So they debated that stuff all the time, but this – this was a slam dunk. Whatever argument Jesus might try to come up with to defend this – they caught the disciples red handed with something that wasn't any kind of borderline grey area. They were in direct violation of multiple rules. By the time they picked the grain, then removed the husks and discarded them, and then ate the wheat, and were travelling

⁵ Ex.20:10, Neh.10:31, Jer.17:21, Ex.35:3, Nm.15:32-36.

on the Sabbath – that’s a good half dozen infractions. So they think they are ready to just bury Jesus and his disciples. There’s no way out of this for them.

Well, Jesus is full of surprises. He cites a passage of Scripture that’s not from the law and that doesn’t even mention the Sabbath, but from that passage he exposes what was wrong in their whole approach. So Jesus cites that passage and then he draws two conclusions – one about the Sabbath, and another about himself.

The Bread of the Presence

25 He answered, “Have you never read

There was nothing in the Bible these men had never read. They had been through the passage Jesus brings up with a fine tooth comb many, many times. But if you’ve read a passage but misinterpret it, or miss the implications for life, then what good is it?

25 Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest,⁶ he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.

When he says **the consecrated bread**, he’s talking about what was called the showbread, or literally, the bread of the presence in the Tabernacle. Every week they were to set 12 huge⁷ loaves of bread out on a gold table in the Tabernacle, and it was called the bread of the presence because it represented Israel being present before the face of God at all times. At all times, 24/7, 365 days a year, those 12 loaves, representing the 12 tribes, were there in God’s house right before the face of God. And it was sacred. God said, “No one but the priests are to ever eat this bread.” When they replaced it each Sabbath day, the priests would eat the old bread. Everything in the Holy Place was extremely sacred, and this bread was no exception. Not only was it forbidden for anyone but a priest to eat it, but it had to be prepared in a very specific way, and arranged on the table in a certain way, and the table it was on had to be gold, and the table itself was so holy that it was to be carried with poles just like the Ark of the Covenant.

So Jesus brings up this event where David, who was not a priest, ate that showbread and let his companions also eat it. What in the world kind of argument is Jesus making here? It’s ok to break God’s law because David did it? David also committed adultery and murder. Just because something happened and is recorded in the Bible doesn’t mean it was good.⁸

So how do we know that what David did was good and not bad? We know that because of the context. If you look back at the context on 1 Samuel leading up to ch.21, there had just been a falling out between David and Saul. David is a fugitive, running from the duly appointed King. And so the question in the reader’s mind at this point is – “Who is going to have God’s favor – Saul or David?” So David goes into the house of God, and he does what he always does – he asks the priest to inquire of the Lord

⁶ According to 1 Sam 21:1–6, Ahimelech, not Abiathar, was high priest at the time. How do we explain this? There are a few possible explanations. One is that like Annas and his son Caiaphas in the time of Jesus, Ahimelech and his son Abiathar were both serving together as high priests in David’s time.

Another possibility is that Jesus was referring to a portion of the Samuel scroll where the event was recorded. Abiathar was a much more significant figure than Ahimelech, and so it is more likely that Abiathar’s name would be attached to that section of the scroll. The same grammatical construction occurs in Mar_12:26, where it must be translated “have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage concerning the Bush, how God spoke unto him ...?” The construction is designed to call attention to the section of a biblical book where the reference is found, in the above instance Exo_3:1 ff.

A similar explanation is that Jesus mentions Abiathar because he is the one who escaped the slaughter at Nob and ended up being the priest associated with David as the story went on. It is not unusual to use a title for which someone was later known even when referring to an event prior to him having that title. One might say, “President Trump was born in New York” even though he wasn’t President yet when he was born.

⁷ Each one was baked with 3.5 lb of flour.

⁸ Even the rabbis understood this. They required that for a point to be proven it must be shown from the law, not from historical material.

for him.⁹ That's one of the ways the book of Samuel shows David's submission to God and loyalty to God – he's always inquiring of the Lord about what to do.

1 Samuel 22:10 Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions

The implication is that God gave the priest the green light to give David the food.

What do you know from past history about what happens when someone does something out of the ordinary with regard to something in the Holy Place? Remember Uzzah? He transported the ark once on a cart instead of the prescribed way, and when the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached out to keep the ark from falling off the cart, God instantly struck him dead. When Nadab and Abihu switched up the way the offering was presented, God burned them alive on the spot. But nothing like that happens here, because this has God's approval. And as you read through the next chapter you see that the high priest is presented in a very positive light. He is representing God. So what's happening is that God is showing that in this conflict with Saul, David has God's favor. And God shows that by making a dramatic exception to his law to take special care of David. David needs some food, and God provides him with food literally right off God's own table.

So you can show from the 1 Samuel text that what David did was approved by God, but that still leaves a lot of questions. You expect Jesus to say, "Look, my disciples aren't breaking God's Sabbath law – they are just breaking your legalistic rules and human traditions." But instead, he brings up a time when David broke, not a tradition, but the actual law of God from Scripture. So what is Jesus' point – that breaking the law is fair game now? If we want to know what Jesus' point is, all we have to do is look at the conclusion that he draws in vv.27-28. And when we do that, we see that Jesus is actually making 2 points.

The Sabbath is for Man

The first is in v.27.

27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Evidently, the Pharisees' way of interpreting the Sabbath law missed the principle of the Sabbath being for man. They were interpreting the Sabbath in ways that assumed man was for the Sabbath.

So Jesus corrects that and says, "No, the Sabbath was made for man" – but how does Jesus get that from the event with David in 1 Samuel? The law in question in 1 Sam.21 isn't the Sabbath law,¹⁰ but was a similar law. Let me explain what I mean.

The Purpose of the Symbolic Law

What was the purpose of the whole bread of the presence law? To answer that, it's important to understand the difference between moral laws and symbolic laws. In moral laws, like don't murder or don't commit adultery, the meaning of the law is in the action itself. It doesn't matter what your motives are, it doesn't matter what circumstances are – the act of murder, or the act of adultery are always wrong. But there are other laws that are symbolic. There is nothing inherently moral or immoral about bread sitting on a table. It's a symbol, pointing to something else.

Pointing to what? What's the purpose? Why do you think God set that whole thing up – having 12 loaves of bread sitting in the presence of God at all times? What do you think?

It was to bring comfort and assurance to God's people, right? It's to show God's constant favor on his people. God is saying to his people, "You are like bread sitting on my table, before my face at all

⁹ That part is not mentioned until 22:10, but it places that inquiry prior to the priest

¹⁰ The Jews believed that the event with the bread of the presence in 1 Samuel 21 took place on the Sabbath (since the bread is being replaced), but Jesus doesn't highlight that part.

times.” So the purpose of this symbolic law was to assure the people of God’s presence with them and his care for them.

Why the placement on the golden table and the restrictions on who could eat the bread? That was to show reverence toward God.

So, you have this symbolic ritual designed to bring comfort and assurance to God’s people , to show God’s favor on his people, and to show reverence toward God.

So then what happens in a situation where David and his men are running for their lives, and they are in need of food, and there is no other food around? Should the Lord’s anointed just starve so this ritual illustrating God’s constant care for his people stays in place? Would that fulfill the purpose of that law? No. The purpose is to comfort God’s people and show his constant care over them. It wouldn’t make sense to let David and his men starve to maintain the symbol. So in order to maintain the purpose of the law, this situation called for an exception.

Showing mercy to people is more important than symbolic rituals. In Matthew’s gospel, when he tells the story of this incident with the disciples picking the heads of grain, Matthew includes something Mark doesn’t mention. When Jesus was giving his response, at one point he brought up Hosea 6:6. That’s the second time Jesus brought it up. The first time was at Matthew’s dinner. When they were criticizing him for eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus gave them a homework assignment. He said, “Go and learn what Hosea 6:6 means.”¹¹ And now, when the Pharisees are upset about his disciples picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus says, “You didn’t do your homework. If you would have done what I said and learned what Hosea 6:6 means, you wouldn’t be making the mistake that you’re making right now.” So what does Hosea 6:6 say?

Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

What does that mean? It means moral laws take precedence over symbolic laws. Rituals must always give way to showing mercy. Rituals, and ceremonies, and symbolic laws have their place to be sure. And they are important – very important. That is to say, the meaning behind them – the reality they point to, is important. I’m calling them symbolic laws; the biblical term for them is *shadows*. And the key to shadow-type laws is that the reality that is casting the shadow is more significant than the shadow. But if you get to the point where your way of keeping rituals causes you to be unmerciful to people, you’re off-track.

So human need rises above ritual in general , and that’s especially true in the case where the whole point of the ritual of the ceremony is to serve as an illustration of God carrying for his people. And that’s what the showbread was.

So this situation with David called for an exception. There are no exceptions to laws against adultery or murder or idolatry or blasphemy, because those are moral laws. Better to starve to death than violate those. But symbolic laws only have meaning with respect to the purpose of the symbol. And so in a case like this, an exception is called for.¹²

The Purpose of the Sabbath Law

Ok, so now how do we apply all that to the Sabbath law? Was the Sabbath law a moral law or a symbolic law? It was symbolic. There is nothing inherently moral or immoral about not working on a particular day. If there were, then we would avoid work every day. The less work the better. But it’s symbolic. Symbolic of what? What does the Sabbath symbolize? We talked about the purpose of the showbread law; what’s the purpose of the Sabbath law?

¹¹ Mt.9:13.

¹² What about the purpose of showing reverence to God by restricting it only to priests? Did the high priest or David violate that purpose? No, they still have attention to showing reverence to God. That’s why David and his men all had to be ceremonially clean in order to eat the bread.

Loyalty to God

It had a few different purposes. One was as a symbol of separation from the Gentiles and loyalty to God. Several times in the OT the people were evaluated as being faithful to God or unfaithful to God based on Sabbath observance.¹³

Day of Worship

Secondly, it was a day of corporate worship, or **sacred assembly** (Lv.23:3). The people were to gather for corporate worship.¹⁴

Day of Rest & Refreshment

And then the primary purpose, it was a day of rest. And not just rest, but refreshment.

Exodus 23:12 Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey and the slave born in your household, and the alien may be refreshed.

That was God's purpose in making the Sabbath. It was a day for being refreshed and rejuvenated and having joy in the Lord.

Isaiah 58:13 If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, 14 then you will find your joy in the LORD.

It was for rest, refreshment, and joy.

Isn't it interesting that that's what God chooses to be one of the chief ways his people showed their loyalty and devotion? When God lays down a way to prove our loyalty to him, it's not to sacrifice your firstborn, it's not to work your fingers to the bone for him, it's not to crawl over broken glass and kiss his statue – the way to really demonstrate your loyalty to God is to simply stop working and take a full day off every week. The true God is a lot different from all the false gods in the religions that humans invent, isn't he? He doesn't need anything from us. We show loyalty to him by resting and trusting him to provide for us. He is glorified not by getting things from us, but by giving things to us.

So the Sabbath is a gift from God to man.

Exodus 16:29 Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath

It's for our benefit.

Determine Specifics According to the Purpose

Ok, so now that we know the purpose of the Sabbath, let's go back to the question of what counts as a violation of the Sabbath. God sets the death penalty for any violation, so it makes perfect sense to ask the question of exactly what constitutes a violation. The rabbis were not wrong to give lots of attention to that question.

You have to do that, because life is lived in the real world. You have to do it with all God's commands. God says to care for the poor. How much? You can't give all your money to the poor, so how much should you give? Are you giving enough? Too much? You can't give to every poor person; which ones should you give to?

¹³ For example, see Isa.56:1,2,6,7, 58:13-14, and Jer.17:22-27.

¹⁴ Ps.92 is a song of worship written specifically for Sabbath Day worship.

Those aren't easy questions, right? But we have to answer them. And what if God set the death penalty if you violate that command? Then you'd *really* give some serious thought to those questions.

So it's good that they took it seriously. But their method was wrong. They decided, "This is serious, so the stricter the better. We'll err on the side of more restrictions."¹⁵

What's wrong with that approach? It conflicts with the purpose of the Sabbath law. The purpose is rest and refreshment. They came up with a system that was more work to try to keep the Sabbath than it was to just go to work on a normal day. People couldn't get around, they couldn't enjoy meals, everything was an infraction unless you had doctoral level knowledge of the various exceptions. They made the Sabbath day a nightmare. The day you weren't supposed to carry a burden became a burden. And that should have been a clue that they were on the wrong track in their interpretation.

Imagine you take your kids to the beach for the first time, and you tell them, "Go out there and play in the waves – it's a blast." And so they go out there, and the whole time they are all worried and shaking in fear, and talking to each other: "When dad said to play in the waves, what do you think he meant by 'play'? What counts as playing? And what counts as being in the waves? What if I swim between the waves – does that count? And the kid starts yelling at his sister: "You're just floating up and down on the waves – *that's not playing*. Oh, are you ever going to be in trouble." What must those kids think of their dad if that's how they think?

The Pharisees' method for determining what counts as work failed to take into consideration the whole purpose of the Sabbath law, and it completely misread the character of God. The showbread law was a law that could bend to let David and his men eat when they were in need without violating the purpose of the law; and in the same way, if you look at the purpose of the Sabbath law, it shouldn't be a violation for some guys who are hungry to grab a bite to eat.

So Jesus tells the story of David and the showbread, and then says, so **the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath**. If they paid attention to what the Bible says about the purpose of the Sabbath, they would have known better than to interpret it in a way that was a burden. Man was not made in order to keep the Sabbath; but the Sabbath was made in order to meet man's needs.

All Laws are For You

That's a fascinating principle. Let me ask you this question: what other laws are for man – for our benefit? All of them. God's laws are not for God. God doesn't profit when I keep a law. It doesn't benefit him.¹⁶ It doesn't help him. It doesn't give him anything he needs. It's not for him; it's for me.

Do you think of God's laws like that? Are you like the writer of Psalm 119?

Psalm 119:97 Oh, how I love your law!

47 I delight in your commands because I love them.

163 I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law.

164 Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.

165 Great peace have they who love your law

167 I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly.

127 Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold 128 I hate every wrong path.

¹⁵ A midrash to Psalm 50:3 assumes that the closer one gets to God, the more exacting one needs to be in observing restrictions (NIAC).

¹⁶ It does glorify him, but only in the sense that it increases people's ability to see his glory. It doesn't make him any more glorious in his nature.

God's law is not something God exacts from man, it is a grace that he confers upon man. It's a boon, not a burden. As John Piper says, we shouldn't think of God's laws as being like a job description. When you read in the Bible, "Do this, don't do that" don't think of that like a job description. It's more like a doctor's prescription. A doctor writes out a list, "Do this exercise, take that medicine, and you'll have health and life." We don't see those commands as burdensome. We pay doctors money to give us those "laws."

This is why it's so ridiculous when people say, "God, if you get me out of this jam, then from now on I will obey your commands and I'll go to church and I'll start praying" As if we are doing God some kind of favor when we do those things, and we can use them to bargain with God. I'm not doing the doctor a favor if I take the pills. I can't say, "Doc, if you do this for me and that for me, then I'll pay you back by taking the pills." If I take the pills and get better, the doctor doesn't owe me – I owe him!

What are the commands you have the most trouble obeying? What restrictions feel the most burdensome to you in the Christian life? If it's something God has prescribed, then realize, it's like the Sabbath day. It's for you. Whatever sins you struggle with – it might help to remind yourself that the law in Scripture against that sin is *for* you. It's for you. It's a good thing.

A Gospel of Joy

Are you picking up on a theme in Jesus' teaching so far? Jesus forgives and heals the paralytic and everyone goes home praising God. Jesus calls Matthew and Matthew throws a big party. On a day when people were supposed to be fasting, Jesus is partying and chowing down. The bridegroom is here, it's time for joy and celebration, not sorrow. Now, when his disciples are in trouble for not knuckling under the burdensome Sabbath rules, Jesus reminds them that the Sabbath is for them – for their refreshment. Do you see the theme of joy? What a breath of fresh air Jesus' teaching is in the choking, stifling smog of legalistic religion.

Ok, so what about the Sabbath? Are we supposed to celebrate the Sabbath in our day, or is it set aside? Is it for us? And if so, which day is it? Is it still Saturday? Or has it moved to Sunday? Or should we do like the American culture and just play it safe by taking both days off? I'll just say right now – yes, the Sabbath is definitely for today. It is crucially important, and it always will be, and it's important to get the day right. Is it Saturday? No. And it's not Sunday either. Is it every day? No – it's definitely a specific day, but not Saturday. So is there any significance at all to Saturday? Yes, there is, because Saturday is the day I'm going to tell you next week what day the Sabbath is. And I think you'll find it an extremely helpful and encouraging truth. But for now, we have to deal with a problem in this text.

Answer #2: Lord of the Sabbath

There's a problem with Jesus' whole argument from 1 Samuel, namely, David was a special case. I am sure there were always plenty of poor people around every single Sabbath when the bread of the presence was replaced. And yet never, in the entire history of Israel is there any record that anyone besides a priest ever ate that bread (except David). So it's not like they handed out that bread any time there was some human need. It happened with David because David was a special case.

David is by far the most important human being in the entire Bible except for Jesus himself. David's name is mentioned 1089 times in the Bible. That is 400 more than Adam, Isaiah, Noah, Elijah, Paul, and Abraham all put together. David is mentioned twice by name before he is even born. God devoted 68 chapters of Scripture to the life of David. Second place is Joseph, with 13. David is the prototype of the Messiah. And in this situation in 1 Sam.21, David was the rightful king of Israel, anointed by God, even though he was not yet sitting on the throne. To say David was a special case would be an understatement.

So how can Jesus apply that passage to this situation? Look at Jesus' second conclusion:

28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Jesus' argument is, "If David can do something then I can certainly do it. I am Lord even of the Sabbath." You couldn't dream up a more staggering claim if you spent your life trying. Who made the Sabbath? The Creator – when he created for 6 days then rested on the 7th. Throughout the OT Yahweh God refers to the Sabbath as "*my* Sabbath." And Mark doesn't record it, but Matthew tells us that in the same breath Jesus also threw in that he is greater than the Temple.

Jesus is exploding their old wineskins. Their old system can't even begin to contain Jesus and his gospel.

Go to some church or institution that has been around even just 100 years and pick one of their traditions and try to change it. You won't succeed. Jesus takes the Sabbath, the most ancient institution in existence, established at the creation, one of the most fundamental identities of the Jewish nation, one of the Ten Commandments, and just says, "It's mine. I own it, I define it, I interpret it, and I can make whatever exceptions to it I please whenever I please. You thought it was yours to define; it's not. It's mine to define, and if I tell these guys they can eat grain then they can eat grain." You've heard the saying, "No man is above the law." One man is. Jesus never broke God's law, but he is indeed above not only all human law, but above even the law of God.

So is Jesus indicating that he's going to make changes to the Sabbath? Yes, I believe that is the implication, and I'll talk more about that next week. But for now the point is simply that he's claiming the authority to do that if he so desires.

In chapter 7 we're going to see Jesus just suddenly declare all foods clean. All the kosher laws about unclean foods that had defined the Jewish people for thousands of years, all God's laws from the Scriptures about unclean foods, he just says, "You know what, as of right now, I'm cancelling all that.

Jesus was not a reformer. Jesus was not saying, "I'm here to reform your religion." He said, "I'm here to end your religion and replace it with me."

Remember, this whole beginning section of Mark has been all about his authority. He showed it when he called the disciples and they immediately left everything and followed. The people in Capernaum were amazed because he taught with far greater authority than the most authoritative teachers in their day. They marveled at his authority over demons – they instantly obeyed him every time. He commanded disease, he had the authority on earth to forgive sins, and now we see him claim authority of the Sabbath day. Later we'll see him command the wind and the waves. And look the title he claims – again.

28 The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Son of Man – where does that come from? Daniel 7. And what does the Son of Man receive in Dan.7? Authority. Authority over what? All nations.

Daniel 7:14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Jesus is saying, "I have authority over people, over demons, over disease, over the creation, over the souls of men, over the lives of men, over all kingdoms and nations and peoples. I have the authority to forgive sins, I have authority over the traditions of the elders and religion, I even have authority over the law of God. I am greater than Moses, greater than David, greater than the Temple – you have never met anyone like me. And I require that you repent and follow me. And if you don't, you will be shut out of the kingdom and die in your sins."

Conclusion

Once again, no answer from the Pharisees. The word "stunned" probably doesn't quite capture it. I can picture them standing there, speechless, motionless, dumbfounded. Peter smiles at them and takes another bite of grain. And Jesus and the disciples walk on down the path, leaving the Pharisees nonplussed, standing there in the middle of that field. They don't even know what hit them.

But Jesus isn't done with them. He's got some more things he wants to teach about the Sabbath, and about their approach to the Sabbath. And this time it's Jesus who is going to force the issue. He doesn't wait for them to ask a question – Jesus bring it up in very dramatic fashion, unlike anything we've seen so far. So far the Pharisees have gone to the disciples about Jesus, or to Jesus about the disciples, but in this next encounter Jesus and the Pharisees go toe to toe, Jesus gets angry, the Pharisees leave in a rage, and the whole thing explodes. That's where we'll pick it up next time.