

**Mark 2:23** Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. **24** And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" **25** But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: **26** how he went into the house of God *in the days* of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?" **27** And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. **28** Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." (NKJV)

Now, this week we have some territory covered by the Gospel of John that is not included in our text. So we will bring ourselves up to date in the story before looking at our text in Mark.

In John 5:1-47 is our story. I will read and elaborate a little.

**John 5:1** After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **2** Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. **3** In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.

**4** For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

(The phrase- waiting for the moving of the water, and the reference to an angel was not in the original text and use words that John does not normally use. It is likely they were added at a later date.)

**5** Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 38 years is plenty of time to prove this guy was obviously not faking and this disease was not going away on its own.

**6** When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" **7** The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

**8** Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." **9** And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

This is similar to how Jesus dealt with the man who was lowered through the roof. He could not get up and walk, but Jesus told him to pick up his bed and walk. We should note here that there were 2 miracles here. First he had **the capacity** now to

walk. Prior to today he didn't have that capacity. But more than that, he had the ability to walk. That doesn't happen to a person disabled for that long. And unlike the previous healing, there is a big difference this time. We read it in the rest of verse 9.

**And that day was the Sabbath. 10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry *your* bed."**

Now, use your imagination here for a minute. Put yourself in this setting. Here is a man who for 38 years has suffered with the circumstances he was in. He had an infirmity of some sort that kept him from walking or working or doing all of the things he probably wanted to do. He has waited for 38 years for a cure.

The man is totally and miraculously cured.

Now the Jews that told the healed man about the law must not have seen the healing. Because they show later in the story that they did not know who **did** the healing.

But it would have been obvious that you are witnessing a miraculous movement of God. You would have known instantly you were in the presence of something wonderful. You would have known instantly that this is something different, something powerful. This man, whoever he is, has the power of God to make people well. He has the power of God that all those religious people around Him did not.

So, in that setting, what would possess you to nit-pick some arguable point of the law? What would cause you to focus on something negative in light of this miraculous display of the love and power of God?

How about jealousy, envy, pride, arrogance, greed? They are the same things that cause us to detract from the glory of God. These Jews did not want to lose the control they maintained over the people. They did not want to lose their power. They didn't want to lose the old wine and old wineskins. So they would rope it in with the old tried and true legalisms.

**11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" 12 Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?"**

Isn't it interesting how they phrase their question? They don't ask, who is the man who healed you? No. The question implies **guilt**, not **wonder**. The question is basically "who is the scoundrel who would have told you to break the law." "We don't really care that he has done something wonderful for you. What we care about is that he is challenging our system, our control, our rules."

Now we need to keep in mind that this man could be stoned to death for this offense. This is a huge deal.

**13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in *that* place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."**

Do you see the obvious difference between so many of the so called tv ministries and Christ? This guy who was healed didn't even know Christ's name. He had no idea who he was.

Then Christ did some follow up. Evidently this man had some kind of sin issue that may have been directly related to his condition. Jesus told him not to continue in sin or something worse might happen.

Note here too, this man says nothing appreciative or thankful. That might be very telling.

**15 The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.**

The man focused on **WHAT** Jesus had done. The Jews focused on **WHEN** Jesus had done it and they want to kill Christ for it. Maybe they sent messengers to retrieve Christ. The next thing we know Christ is in their presence.

**17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."**

**18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. 19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. 20 For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. 21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. 22 For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. 25 Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His**

voice 29 and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. 30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. 31 "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. 32 There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. 33 You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34 Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. 35 He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. 36 But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. 37 And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. 38 But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. 39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. 41 I do not receive honor from men. 42 But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. 43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. 44 How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God? 45 Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (NKJV)

There is a lot to be gained in this passage. I encourage you to look at it this week. I am not going to delve deeper into it. But there are a few things to notice that will help us understand our text today.

First- Jesus healed on a Sabbath and it created a controversy. Without a doubt Jesus knew it would and intended that it would.

Second- Jesus used the opportunity to emphasize that fact that He is God.

Third- Jesus clearly defined what He meant when He said that He was the Son of God.

Fourth- He gave them clear evidence they could appeal to if they wanted to make sure Christ was who He said He was and

Fifth- He very much rebuked these men for their lack of love for God and belief in God.

It was at this point that the Jewish leadership settled into their plans to kill Christ. The Sabbath was their preferred excuse. That was a point where they could look

like they cared more about what God said than Christ did. But the Sabbath really isn't the issue, or they would have entered into a real discussion with Christ about the topic.

No, they despised Christ because He had Power and He claimed to be the Son of God. So that is where our text comes in this morning. Christ had already forcefully rebuked the Jewish leadership. He had done it at length in their power center. They hate Him. And they want to kill Him.

**Mark 2:23** Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain.

Let's take a quick look at what scripture actually says about the Sabbath and how that Sabbath applied to the Jews in that day.

**Exodus 20:10** but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.* (NKJV)

OK, so we see that no work is to be done. But what does that mean? All activity that uses energy cannot possibly be work. For instance, breathing is work by some definitions. So what does God mean when He says no work?

Scripture gives us some examples.

**Exodus 35:3** You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day." (NKJV)

OK, that is clear enough. Starting fires is work.

**Numbers 15:32** Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. (NKJV)

Due to the fact that God had this man killed, we can see that gathering fuel is work. And that should not be done on the Sabbath.

**Jeremiah 17:21** Thus says the LORD: "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring *it* in by the gates of Jerusalem; 22 nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. (NKJV)

Carrying a burden is work. But how big of a burden?

**Nehemiah 10:31** *if* the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's *produce* and the exacting of every debt. (NKJV)

Here we see that buying and selling is seen as work. And that was not to be done on the Sabbath. Nor is the hauling of those burdens to be done.

**Nehemiah 13:15** In those days I saw *people* in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all *kinds of* burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned *them* about the day on which they were selling provisions. (NKJV)

**Nehemiah 13:19** So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted *some* of my servants at the gates, *so that* no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. (NKJV)

So we see here that conducting normal business is considered work and not to be done on the Sabbath. And the burdens referred to in this verse had to do with commerce.

Now, Mark tells us that Jesus and His disciples were travelling on the Sabbath. We have no idea how far they were going. But they were hungry. The law allowed for a person to pick grain like this, or fruit, and to eat what one picks.

**Deuteronomy 23:24** "When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put *any* in your container. 25 When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain. (NKJV)

So, as far as picking they grain, the disciples were conforming to the law. The law was wonderful in that it had provisions whereby you could travel and eat of the standing crops without penalty. Now we haven't yet seen anything in scripture that prohibited them from doing what they were doing.

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What the disciples were doing was simply taking off the hulls of the wheat or barley or whatever grain it was and eating the actual grain. It isn't like it was all that hard to do.

**24** And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

Again we see the Pharisees in their normal state...condemning people for what they see on the surface. They have a boat load of rules and they are always ready to enforce them. The Pharisees are out to get Jesus and they are looking for every opportunity. And the Sabbath violations were one of the best. Even though this technically does not appear to actually be a Sabbath violation.

The Mishna, a book of Jewish traditions, says "He that reapeth corn on the Sabbath to the quantity of a fig is guilty; and plucking corn is reaping"

It went on to tell us that Rubbing the grain out was threshing. Even to walk on the grass on the Sabbath was forbidden because it was a species of threshing. Another Talmudic passage says “In case a woman rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is as threshing; if she cleans off the side-adherences. It is sifting out fruit; if she throws them up in her hand, it is winnowing.

The Pharisees had rules for everything.

But look at the response Christ gives them. He doesn't even argue that what they are doing is not unlawful. No. He takes a completely different approach.

In the account given by Matthew, Jesus gave three arguments.

- 1- What David did- our account covers this so we will look at this in a bit. But the answer Christ gave affirms that God's law, and the Sabbath as part of it, allows for **meeting the true needs of human beings**.
- 2- What the priests did- Basically the argument is that the Sabbath isn't absolute because the Priests do work on the Sabbath and it is lawful. So **work done in worship is permissible**.
- 3- What Hosea said. Hosea said “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” or in practice, God desires people having **the heart of God** over people **trying to get all the technicalities right** without that heart. The application is that the **Sabbath allows the doing of good to others**, the showing of mercy.

This is important. Restated, Christ will show that it is permissible on the Sabbath **to meet needs, do acts of worship**, and to **do good to others**.

Now, of those three examples that Christ used, the only one that is likely to strike a chord with Mark's Roman audience would be the reference of David. David would have been seen to be a very influential man and a great hero. So Mark limits his story to just David.

**25 But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: 26 how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?"**

Look at how Christ asks the question. Have you never read? Christ is being sarcastic and cutting. One thing is for sure. They would have read this. They were the experts after all. But they did not allow what it says to change how they think. They have some preconceived notions and no amount of scripture will change how they see things. In understanding God and understanding Scripture, our assumptions are the most dangerous traits. A great deal of damage is done to scriptural interpretation due to what we assume **it must mean**. We do well to come to scripture ready at all points to be corrected.

Let's read this account of David.

**1 Samuel 21:1** Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, "Why *are* you alone, and no one is with you?" **2** So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.'

And I have directed *my* young men to such and such a place. **3** Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give *me* five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found." **4** And the priest answered David and said, "*There is* no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women." **5** Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women *have been* kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and *the bread is* in effect common, even though it was sanctified in the vessel this day." **6** So the priest gave him holy *bread*; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place on the day when it was taken away.* (NKJV)

Now, this bread was not lawful for David and his men to eat it. But David and Ahimelech both somehow knew that this law prohibiting such a thing was surrounded by other priorities, and that some priorities outweighed others. They somehow got the right idea about mercy and sacrifice. So feeding these men was of a higher priority than going through the proper ceremony. Meeting a need was more important than the ceremony. Frankly, I don't know how they determined that. But they did and they were obviously correct, because Christ uses it as a legal precedent for what his disciples are doing.

Now, Christ calls the Pharisee's attention to this. This passage is something that the Pharisees had never done proper business with. They didn't seem to understand any kind of hierarchalism where some laws are more important than others. They held a rigid structure of rules that did nothing but condemn those who tried to follow them. There was no thought of it being ok for a guy who has just been miraculously healed to be able to carry his cot home that day. How they could view that task as being a labor is almost ridiculous. It would have been a wonderful joy to do such a thing.

They had obviously focused so intensely at the letters of the law that they had completely lost the Spirit of its maker.

Years ago Mike took us through a study of ethics. The pressing question that needed answered was, what do you do when you find yourself in a situation where no matter what you do, you will need to break a law? He pointed to situations where telling the truth would have cost a good man his life to an unjust force. One



example is Rahab in Jericho where Rahab lied to the government officials about the whereabouts of the spies. Mike brought out that if she told the truth, it would cost some good men their lives. But if she lied, she would be violating God's law. She lied and she was blessed for doing so. There are lots of examples like this in scripture. Mike never believed, in any instance, that you had to do a **wrong** action. He believed that doing the greatest good was doing the right thing. And that all laws fall in a hierarchy. So you are not doing something wrong when you are obeying a greater good, even though it breaks a lesser law. Mike found the source for this thinking in the fact that Jesus, Himself, taught that laws fall in a hierarchy. Loving God is the greatest law. Loving your neighbor comes next. And so on. Matthew tells us that Jesus also said the following words in this encounter. He told the Pharisees-

**7 But if you had known what *this* means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. (NKJV)**

Jesus appeared to be teaching a hierarchalism based on His own character. That is the reasoning in David's case. He is teaching the Pharisees that there are things that are more important than a strict adherence to the Sabbath. That does not mean, at all, that they should have been nonchalant about the Sabbath. That could have cost them their lives. But they should have exhibited mercy to temper their sacrifices. They should have allowed **the proper heart** to guide their **exhibition of worship**. Had they had the proper attitude, the proper heart, the proper priority, the proper understanding seasoned with mercy, they wouldn't have drawn the harsh and errant conclusions that they drew. They would not be condemning those who haven't done anything wrong. They wouldn't have condemned the man who carried his cot home. And they wouldn't have condemned the disciples who were just snacking on their way through the grain field. And they certainly would not have condemned the Lord of the Sabbath.

Then look what Christ goes on to say.

**27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." (NKJV)**

The Pharisees had it all backwards. They did not understand or love God. So they could not possibly carry out His law with God's heart.

Maybe you have it backwards this morning. Do you feel that God's rule over your life is oppressive? Do you think that God is some kind of cosmic kill joy, ruining your fun at every turn? If so, you view God like the Pharisees did. You are missing the point.

The point is that man was created to worship God, to glorify God. And God is a loving God. He is good to His children. But scripture is clear that we start life

with a heart that is far from Him. We were born in a sinful state. And what it takes for us to love God the way we were intended to is a new heart. What we need is a miracle for God to take our hearts of stone and turn them into hearts of flesh, hearts that are capable of responding to God's love.

If you find yourself running from God it is because you view God wrongly. Call upon Him for salvation, for a changed heart. Call upon Him to open your eyes so that you can see Him for who He is. Because when you see Him for who He is, you will see that trusting Him and Obeying Him is the best thing you could possibly do. Christ isn't the hammer of the Sabbath. He isn't pounding the Sabbath club over everyone's head. He is the Lord of the Sabbath, using it and conforming it to His children's best interest. That is what Christ is like to His children.

The Sabbath was never intended as a burden to a human. It was originally a restriction that would help him wean himself from the curse for one day in His worship to God. For one day they would forget about the weeds, forget about the labor. And they were going to enjoy the life that God gave them. It would be a tiny taste of the Garden of Eden. The Sabbath was for man.

But the Pharisees had that turned around. They had it figured that the Sabbath was the focus and men better get with the program.

And if Christ is Lord of man, He is also Lord of the Sabbath. He can do as He pleases with the Sabbath. If He wants to change it for man's good, He can. In essence, Christ was saying that He was more sacred than the Sabbath is. Wow.

When Christ said that He was Lord of the Sabbath, the Pharisees would have known what He meant. He was, again, ascribing qualities to Himself that only God would have. He was essentially claiming to be God. And this would have, like always, set them over the edge. When Christ was done talking they would just want to kill Him more.

Christ had refused to submit to their leadership.

He had embarrassed them by a superior explanation of God's word than they could give.

He undermined one of their major tenants, that the Sabbath is of higher priority than the true need of a human. Jesus reverses that and says that the Sabbath was made for man.

And Christ claimed to not only **not be subject** to the laws of the Sabbath but to be the **Lord of the Sabbath**.