

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
Senior Pastor Titus Green
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The Lord of the Sabbath
Mark 2:23-3:6

This morning, we are continuing our study of the book of Mark. And, before we dig into our text, let me just remind you what is going on in this section. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Mark is clearly establishing the fact that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

And, since Jesus is God in the flesh, He lived with the authority of God. He cast out demonic spirits. He healed diseases. He tells people how to live and expects them to reorder their entire lives around Him as the King of God's Kingdom. So, this opening section of the Gospel of Mark is focused on the authority of Jesus as God.

But there's something else going on here. Beginning with chapter 2, Mark tells 5 stories in a row that not only demonstrate the authority of Jesus, but they also highlight the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders (scribes and Pharisees) that would ultimately lead to His murder at the cross. And our text for this morning covers the final 2 stories in this series. So, let's look at our next passage in this study of Mark.

Mark 2:23–3:6 (ESV)

23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" 27 And 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."

3:1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." 4 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

So, the final two stories in this section connect two encounters Jesus had with the religious leaders on the Sabbath. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Jewish Sabbath, let me give you a bit of background so you can understand what's going on in our text. God established the pattern for Sabbath at the very beginning of the creation of the universe. Genesis 2:2 us that, after having created everything in 6 days, "2 ...on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he

rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”

So, God established a pattern of work and rest that He built into the fabric of creation. Then, when He gave the ten commandments to the people of Israel, He included the Sabbath as the fourth commandment.

Exodus 20:8–10 (ESV)

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...”

God commanded the people of Israel to have Sabbath rest on the seventh day of every week, which is Saturday. So, God is the Author and Authority of the Sabbath. That means, when Jesus tells the Pharisees that He is “Lord of the Sabbath,” He is clearly saying He has the authority of God Himself, which means He is God in the flesh.

The Pharisees are up in arms at Jesus’ claim to be God. They act like they are deeply offended that Jesus is challenging the authority of God. But our text reveals something else that was going on under the surface. You see, it wasn’t just the authority of God that was being challenged, it was the authority of the religious leaders.

Mark 2:23-24

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Jesus and His disciples were just walking through a grainfield. And, as they walked, they plucked some heads of grain. The Pharisees confronted them and accused them of breaking the law of Sabbath. But all they did was pluck some heads of grain. How could that be considered work? Well, through the years, the Pharisees created an exhaustive and exhausting list of Sabbath rules they claimed would violate God’s prohibition of work on the Sabbath.

For instance, they said tailors weren’t allowed to carry a needle on the Sabbath because that was their instrument of work. They said no one was allowed to carry anything that weighed more than a dried fig, or that was work. They said if you tossed an object into the air, it had to be caught with the same hand or it was considered work. They said the only medical treatment you could give was to keep someone alive, but if you improved their condition that constituted work.

And on and on and on their ideas of what was and wasn’t lawful on the Sabbath went. It was so extensive that the Sabbath became the worst day of the week for many people. The regulations of the Pharisees made it hard work to rest on the Sabbath. And the Pharisees loved it. They loved the feeling of authority and superiority and control. In their self-righteousness, they loved being able to show how much better they were than everyone else. And, in their minds, nothing showed that more clearly than the Sabbath. Once a week, they were able to put on a religious show in honor of

themselves. They made up commandments that were nearly impossible to follow but were just possible enough that a super motivated self-righteous person could do it.

Then, Jesus came along. And He didn't put up with their shenanigans for a second. He knew their ridiculous traditions and He intentionally exposed them. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. And He is Lord of the Pharisees whether they wanted to admit it or not. And that's what they hated most. They hated that Jesus didn't play their little games and yield to their authority.

And in our text, Jesus peels back the curtain, not just on the heart of the Pharisees, but on the heart of God Himself. He reveals why God gives us commands and how He enables us to fulfill them so that we don't have to dread them. He shows us that His heart is very different than the heart of the Pharisees. And all of those dynamics come together to form our big idea for this morning.

Big Idea: As the Lord of God's Law, Jesus instructs us for our good and empowers us for our obedience.

That's what Mark shows us in the details of this section. It's not just that Jesus is God, it's that Jesus reveals the heart of God behind all of His commands.

1. Jesus instructs us for our good.

27 And 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."

This is what I meant when I said Jesus peels back the curtain. He shows us why God gave the Sabbath in the first place. It was for the good of man. God wanted His people to rest. He wanted them to be renewed and refreshed. Even more, He wanted to give them a break from focusing on their work so they could focus on their relationship with Him. So, God's command to have a Sabbath rest was for the good of people. It was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

As the One who gave the Law, the heart of Jesus is for the good of His people. His commands are protective, not restrictive. And, to make sure we get that point, Jesus brings up an example that isn't about the Sabbath.

25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"

This is a reference to something that happened in 1 Samuel 21. David was on the run from King Saul. He and his men had run out of food, so David went to the tabernacle (which was like a mobile Temple) and asked the priest for help. The priest only had the bread of the Presence. The Bread of Presence was part of the ceremonial law of the Old Testament that governed things like worship and Temple sacrifice. Every week, twelve loaves of bread would be presented before the Lord. Bread

represents fellowship, like when we talk about breaking bread together. So, the twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel and their desire to live in fellowship with God.

Here's the catch, the ceremonial Law of God said when the bread was taken out of the presence of God each week, the only people permitted to eat it were the priests. But the priest who received David's request decided to technically break that law and give the bread to David and his men. And God didn't punish the priest or David. And what Jesus is pointing out is there is a purpose, or an intent to all the commands of God. His heart behind it all was to bring good, not harm to people.

Now, I anticipate that some people might wonder if this means that we don't need to follow the commands of God as long as our intentions are good. Well, that's an entire sermon to itself, but the ceremonial law of God was laid aside once Jesus came as it's fulfillment. He is the sacrifice that the sacrificial system was pointing to. But there is a different type of law in the Scripture. It's the moral law of God. You never find the moral law of God being laid aside or presented as non-binding for our life. As a matter of fact, during His earthly ministry, Jesus reinforced the moral laws of God, like the commands around honesty and integrity and sexual purity. Even more, through the teaching of the Apostles, Jesus clarified the commands that are still binding on God's people. So, Jesus isn't bringing up the story about David to say that moral relativism and situational ethics are the norm for God's people. He's simply illustrating the point that God's heart behind all of His commands has always been for the good of His people. In other words, Jesus instructs us for our good.

One of the very first rules we ever had for our kids was the rule that Logan wasn't allowed to touch this old wooden chest that we had in our living room. We instituted that rule as soon as he started learning to crawl. Anytime he got close to that chest, we would firmly tell him "No" and if he reached out to touch it, we would lightly smack him on the hand. I'm sure all of you had a similar rule about letting your kids on the furniture. (just kidding)

Can you guess why we would have that rule? Because that chest was beautiful and expensive, and we didn't want his grubby little paws getting smudgy little prints all over it. Of course, that wasn't the reason. We had that rule because our television sat on that chest, and we knew the day would come when he would start pulling himself up on things in our living room. And even though it was a sturdy chest, we didn't want to take any chances. We wanted to protect him. That rule was for his good.

And Jesus is infinitely more devoted to the good of His children than we are. So, all of His commands and instructions are for our good. And even though we no longer live under the Old Testament Law, the New Testament is filled with commands and instructions for how we should live. Scholars estimate there are over 1,000 commands in the New Testament.

Through the New Testament Apostles, Jesus tells...

- Children to obey their parents
- Husbands to love their wives and live sacrificially for their good
- Wives to respect and submit to their husbands
- Employees to honor their employers

Jesus tells us to not be lazy but to work hard...

- He tells us to live in sexual purity
- to live with personal integrity
- to be extreme in our generosity
- to be patient in tribulation and to be thankful in all things
- to not forsake assembling with other believers

And all of Christ's commands come from the same heart: He wants what is good for us. And just think about your relationship to the commands of Jesus. There are lots of different responses to the commands of Jesus. *Some people live in denial.* For one reason or another, they live as though Jesus doesn't give us any commands, as though being freed from the Old Testament law means we live in lawlessness. Yes, we live under grace. But grace is never an excuse for sin.

Titus 2:11&12 - For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

Other people live in despair. They live as though the commands of the Scripture are repressive rules that are designed to make us miserable and take all the joy out of life. But, for those who know the heart of Jesus, their relationship with the commands of Christ is one of delight.

1 John 5:3 - For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

When you understand that Jesus is working for your good, to bring you lasting joy, to make your life full of the pleasure and meaning that only He can provide, His commands are a delight. They are like a not-so-secret code for how life works best. So, what would change in your life today if you saw the commands of Jesus as something for your good? Is there any place in your life where you aren't living in complete obedience to Jesus? If you are a rule maker, parent, boss, teacher, do your rules have the good of people in mind? Jesus instructs us for our good, but there's something else we see in our text that keeps the commands of God from being burdensome.

2. Jesus empowers us for our obedience.

3:1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." 4 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

Just think about what is going on here. Jesus has just revealed that He is the Lord of God's Law. He's the one who instituted the commands. And all His commands are for our good. Then, He encounters a man with a withered hand. And, in verse 4, He emphasizes His commitment to do what was good for people. He's obviously pointing out that the Pharisees didn't reflect the heart of God. They didn't want Him to heal on the Sabbath because their self-righteous hearts cared more about

their religious rules than the people Jesus came to save. So, Jesus is revealing the wicked heart behind the Pharisees' religion.

But He is also teaching us something related to His commands. Jesus doesn't just heal this man. Notice how He specifically heals him. Verse 5 - *[Jesus] said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.*

Do you see it? Jesus gives Him a command! He doesn't say "You are healed" the way He does with some other people. He commands him to stretch out his hand. Jesus commands him to do something impossible. And the man doesn't say, "Jesus, I can't." He believes Jesus can make him able to do something that was otherwise impossible for him. And He obeys Jesus in the healing power of Jesus. And it was then that his hand was restored.

And that's a powerful picture of something else related to the commands of Jesus, they aren't just for our good, they are enabled by the power of Jesus when we trust in Jesus and not ourselves. That's the other reason the commands of God are not burdensome. Jesus will give us the power to obey when we trust in Him.

We can live the way Jesus commands us to live when we believe Jesus will give us the power to do everything, He has commanded us to do. Many of us hear the commands of Jesus and we look at our lives and think, "that's impossible." Just think about 3 of the commands I mentioned earlier...

Jesus commands us to live with extreme generosity (2 Cor. 9). Some of us hear that command, look at our finances and think "that's impossible." But what if you believed Jesus will empower your obedience as soon as you take a step of faith? How generous would you be if you truly believe that command is for your good and will be empowered by Jesus?

Jesus commands us to be patient in tribulation (Romans 12:12). Some of you are walking through incredibly difficult situations and you think you can't wait another day for God to deliver you. But what if you believed Jesus will empower your patience as you wait on Him? What if you believed that command is for your good and will be empowered by Jesus? How patiently would you wait on the Lord?

Jesus commands us to honor our employers (Ephesians 6; 1 Peter 2). Some of us have employers that make that command seem impossible. But what if you believed Jesus will empower you as you take a step of faith and attempt to honor and respect your employer? How respectful would you be?

Listen, I don't know what area of obedience you are most struggling with today, but I can't help but ask, what would change about the way you live if you were confident that Jesus would give you His ability to live? Well, that's exactly what He has promised to do! That's the salvation Jesus offers.

So, hear the word of God for us this morning: Everything Jesus has commanded you to do is for your good and He will enable you to obey in a way that is naturally impossible for you.