

Mark 2:22 – 3:6
The Sabbath and the Heart of God (Part 1)
February 22, 2009

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Tonight, we come back to Mark's gospel and to the study of the life of Christ from the vantage point really of the Apostle Peter. Mark was a protégé of Peter, and as he writes, we really see the heart of Peter beating through this account of the life of Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite books is a book entitled, *The Pharisee's Guide to Total Holiness*. I don't recommend everything in the book, but I love that title. It provided me (at a time in my life when I was at college) some real insight into the mindset of the legalistic thinking of some of the people with whom I'd attended college. A Christian college, where I learned a lot of good things, I got a good education but also came with some baggage including legalism.

In one of my copies on my shelf in my office of this book, *The Pharisee's Guide to Total Holiness* is a document that Sheila and I kept from that college. There were a myriad of rules, and if you violated those rules you received demerits. If you accumulated enough demerits, privileges were revoked and eventually you were expelled, shipped as it was called. The document we kept is a demerit slip; pre-printed with a list of some of the more common infractions. There's a blown-up copy of a demerit slip. Here are a few of my favorites, there's a whole list of--I think there are 93 different infractions. I don't think all of them are on here, but many of them are across the bottom. Here are a few of the more ridiculous ones.

Failure to pass room inspection.

Disregarding a "do not disturb" sign.

A breach of dress, minor and major. And I'll spare you the definitions of those.

Horseplay; now there's something that never happens in a boy's dorm in college, minor and major.

In another dorm before rising bell.

Absent from a meal; that never happened.

Noise disturbance; again that was one of those things that just really was unnecessary to even tell college students.

Improper classroom behavior; it's pretty ambiguous.

Studying in class, God forbid, I think it meant something else.

Questionable music.

The misuse of the phone.
Refusing to give your name.
My personal favorite; gum chewing.
And then there was one that was taken off of this slip which used to be on the slip,
and it was leaving a coke bottle in your laundry basket.

There's just a few of those infractions that you'd never want to do in college. Sadly, a preoccupation with picayunish rules is not just true at the Christian college I attended, that tendency is latent in every one of us. It's very common in the spiritual world to resort to rules in the place of God's clear word. It was true in the time of the first century in Jesus' day. There was a group that specialized in such things; they were called the Pharisees. I want you to notice Jesus' assessment of this group.

Turn with me to Matthew as we begin tonight, Matthew 23. This is, as you know, Jesus' woes on the Pharisees and in the middle of this, verse 23 He says this, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin," [In other words, you tithe, you give 10 percent of the herbs that you have] "and [yet] you have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others."

In other words, their system of values of what was spiritually weighty was all skewed. They took great care in doing the minor things and neglected the weightier ones. This is who they were. There's another passage that really details this. We'll get to it in a in a little while in Mark 7. Turn there with me now. Mark 7 and look at verse 8. A particular episode of the disciples not washing their hands ceremonially before they ate came up, and the Pharisees asked Jesus about it, and Jesus responds like this in verse 8.

"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition."

Notice verse 13, "... [You invalidate] ... the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down;" [And this last phrase just sent shivers down my spine.] "and you do many things such as that."

I've often prayed Lord, if I do many things such as that help me to see it. He gave them a couple of examples, and He said you do this in a lot of different ways. This was the Pharisees, and we begin to see them in their true colors in the passage that we come to tonight. We begin to see a vivid contrast between the pure, spotless, righteousness of Christ and the hypocrisy of the spiritual leaders, and they stand in stark contrast to each other.

The section that we are looking at is Mark 2. It begins in verse 23 and really runs down through 3:6. Two incidents; these are the fourth and fifth incidents in a series of confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders of the nation. They've already taken issue with Jesus' authority to forgive sins, with His eating and drinking with tax-collectors and sinners, and last week with His refusing to fast. But the key issue or flashpoint here in both of these incidents becomes the Sabbath. Jesus uses two separate incidents (one that occurs naturally and the other that He seems to personally arrange) to enable us to see His own heart; a heart of true righteousness toward God.

Now especially as it pertains to the keeping of the Sabbath here's a brief outline of what we see. In 2:23 - 28, we see the Sabbath room for necessity. Room for need and in 3:1 - 6 the Sabbath, room for mercy. You can do these things on the Sabbath. In many ways the theme of this paragraph is found down in verse 28 of chapter 2. "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

So, let's begin to look at the first account and the fact that there is room in the Sabbath law for need, for necessity. Let me read the passage to you, look at Mark 2:23.

And it happened that He [That is Jesus,] was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads *of grain*. The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar *the* high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for *anyone* to eat except the priest, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Now, as you look at that brief account, it's obvious that there's the question of the Pharisees followed by Jesus' answer, so let's look first at the question. The question that really isn't a question. The Pharisees are making a point to Jesus. It says in verse 23, "and it happened that he was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath." Now realize, at this point we're about a year and a half into Jesus' ministry; at the point that we're reading here. The first full year of His ministry there was a wave of public favor, crowds were seeking Him out, they loved Jesus, there was very little negative about Him at all. But now things have begun to turn; first with the leaders, and (as we'll see later) with the people.

Between Mark 2:22 (where we left off last time) and Mark 2:23 (in the white space between those two verses) we find out from the other gospels that several months pass. John 5 records for us what happened in the white space between those two verses. Jesus left Galilee and went down to Jerusalem for one of those annual feasts, one of the three annual feasts that was required for all Jewish males. Wherever you were in the land of Israel, you were required on those three occasions to head down to Jerusalem. We don't know which feast this was, but based on the timing, (and we'll get into that in just a moment) either it was Passover, or it was Pentecost, the celebration that came 50 days after Passover. So, we're looking at the spring, or the late spring or early summer.

While Jesus was there, He had an altercation with the leaders of the nation, interestingly enough, over the issue of the Sabbath. You can read about it in John 5:1 - 14. Jesus, you remember, goes to the pools of Bethesda, and there He heals a man who had been sick for 38 years. And Jesus tells him to get up, take up his pallet, and carry it away, walk. Sounds okay doesn't it, but here's the problem. John 5:9 says, "now it was the Sabbath, on that day." Notice what happens. Turn over to John 5. All of this happens just before the account I just read to you in Mark's gospel. John 5, He's down in Jerusalem. He's just healed a man at the pool at Bethesda. Look at verse 16.

For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." [God works on the Sabbath, He's My Father, We're equal, I'm working too.] [Didn't go over very well], verse 18, For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He was not only breaking the Sabbath, but also calling God His own personal Father, making Himself equal with God.

So, Jesus goes to Jerusalem, and things don't go well. The issue is about the Sabbath. After this confrontation, Jesus returns to Galilee, and that's where we pick up the story in Mark 2:23. It's probably, (as far as the timing goes), it's probably late spring. It's probably about the time to harvest the wheat in May or June somewhere in that category. And here again we learn that it's the Sabbath according to verse 23. Jesus was passing through the grainfields, and (as we learned in our study of the parable of the soils) there were no fences you remember between the grainfields. Your property butted up against someone else's property, and the only thing marking that property line was a small trail; large enough for the farmer and his animals and travelers to walk down.

Travelers like Jesus and His disciples used those paths as well. It was evidently (this particular field was) near the city of Capernaum because the Pharisees don't accuse Jesus here of violating the Sabbath day's journey; you remember which was about two thirds of a mile. You couldn't go further than that on the Sabbath day, and so apparently it was nearby the city of Capernaum. We don't know why Jesus was out there, but there He was. It was near harvest time, and the trail would have been crowded. So, you have this thin trail, they're walking down. The trail would have been crowded with wheat on both sides. Wheat grows to about 3 feet, and so it's near harvest, the heads are sticking up. And as the disciples walk along, we read, "they were picking the heads of grain."

Matthew adds, "and His disciples became hungry." So they took advantage of a first century snack. Luke 6:1 says, "Now it happened that He was passing through *some* grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands and then eating *the grain* [that was left]."

The Old Testament law allowed this by the way, someone passing through someone else's field could assuage his hunger by taking a little bit of the grain that was there. Deuteronomy puts it like this. Deuteronomy 23:25, "When you enter your neighbors standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbors standing grain."

In other words, you couldn't take advantage of the situation. You know, and as you walked through your neighbor's field just happen to have my sickle with me, and you know, you take a little extra for the afternoon.

So, the disciples were completely within the law in what they're doing here. But the problem was the day. It was the Sabbath. And so, verse 2 says, "The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

Now there are a couple of interesting things to note here. First of all, the fact that there were Pharisees with Jesus on the Sabbath. There's only one reasonable explanation for that, and it grows out of the confrontation we just read about down in Jerusalem Jesus had had over this very issue. So, the leaders in Jerusalem apparently assigned a group of Pharisees to sort of track Jesus, to stay with Him and to watch for further violations; a kind of squeal squad if you will. And immediately when they see the disciples, so they're (you can just picture this can't you?) These guys just sort of tracking along behind Jesus, watching for a misstep, and with some degree of excitement and glee, they watch as His disciples began to pick this grain as they walk between these, down this narrow trail between the two fields and begin to eat it.

Luke says that they spoke first to the disciples. Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath? And then they spoke to Jesus their leader, "Look" you see that in the in the text, it's a Greek word that has the idea of strong disapproval and shock. "Look at what they're doing, imagine that, see here!" The Pharisees are saying to Him, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Now, it's impossible for us to fully appreciate their concern if you don't really understand either: a) what the Bible taught about the Sabbath, or
b) what the Sabbath had become in first century Judaism.

So, I want to take just a moment to kind of fill this out for you because I think you'll appreciate Jesus' answer a lot more if you have that background. You know, it's interesting, because a lot of people talk about what does the Bible mean to me, what does the Bible mean to me? Listen you can't ask that question. The question isn't what does the Bible mean to me? The question is: what does the Bible mean? And the only way to understand the Bible is not to bring it into our times (which a lot of people do), it's to go back into that time and understand what was happening. So, then you can bridge the gap and apply it in an appropriate way. So, let's go back, as it were, and get into the minds of these first century Jews so we can understand what's happening here.

First of all, let's get a biblical perspective on the Sabbath because this isn't something we think about a lot. The Hebrew word is Shabbat. It's used most often to refer to the seventh day of the week of a seven-day week. It probably comes from a Hebrew word that means to cease. So, it's the day of ceasing, the day on which all work stops. It was based on the week of creation,

according to Genesis 2 and Exodus 20 refers back to Genesis 2 when God rested on the seventh day. By the way, even the wording of Genesis flows into this command because it determined when the Sabbath began and when it ended.

You remember the wording in the creation account; it says it was evening and morning, the first day. It was evening and morning, the second day. So, the Jews said obviously God intended us then to mark the days from sunset to sunset. So, the Sabbath began at sunset on Friday evening and morning and ended at sunset on Saturday. That was the mark of the Sabbath. So, it ended at sundown on Friday (or excuse me), it began at sundown on Friday and lasted through sundown on Saturday.

Now it appears that apparently the keeping of the Sabbath preceded, and I double worded there, preceded preceded the Ten Commandments. Alright, in other words, there seem to have been some understanding in the Jewish mind before the Ten Commandments were given that the seventh day was to be set apart. You can read about that in Exodus 16, and I put the references there. I'm not going to take you there. But there seems to have been an understanding that the seventh day was to be separate. It was to be not a workday. And it specifically comes in with the manna in Exodus 16. So that's an interesting little study, a little side light.

But the main thing that we know about Shabbat is that it was ordered in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, of the Ten Commandments. It's the longest of the Ten Commandments, and we're given two reasons for the Sabbath in the Scripture. Reason number one is God's example at creation. In Exodus 20 we read, "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day, therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

So, because of what God did, His own example in creation. He created for six days. The seventh day He rested, therefore you're to work for six days, and you're to rest on the seventh day.

There's another reason given in Scripture though and that's God's deliverance from Egypt. In Deuteronomy 5:15 it says, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand by an outstretched arm; therefore, the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day."

So, there's this sort of dual purpose behind this Shabbat. It was a reminder to the children of Israel of God's creation. They were to reflect on creation. If you want to keep the Sabbath by the way, there's a good way to do it. Let it be a reminder of God as Creator. And it was also a reminder of God as Redeemer. That He redeemed His people from Israel. Specifically, Shabbat was to be a sign of Israel's allegiance or loyalty to God.

In Exodus 31:13 we read, "But as for you speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.'" [Or who set you apart unto Himself.]

Same thing in Ezekiel 20:12, "Also I gave them My ... [Shabbats] to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am ... [Yahweh' who set them apart to Myself]."

Now what was their responsibility on the Sabbath? What could they do and not do? Well, basically it's important to understand that Shabbat was to be observed by every living being; animals, servants, guests and members of the household. Basically, there was no living being in your household that wasn't to observe the Sabbath. The main requirement was that there be no labor or work. He says six days you shall work. Folks, I hate to tell you, but the Bible knows nothing of four-day or five-day work weeks.

Six days shall you work, and most of us find ourselves doing that, and we spend time working at home and doing all the necessities of life and then away from our home whereas in the ancient world it would involve in sort of an ebb and flow together. Six days shall you work, but on the seventh day there was to be no labor or work. And there are a few examples of that; no gathering of manna I mentioned in Exodus 16, no kindling of a fire, Exodus 35:3.

By the way, to this day, the Jews practice Shabbat, and when you're in Israel, they take this in a variety of ways. They see turning on a light switch, or here's the hardest part, pressing an elevator button to be starting a fire. It's electricity, you're starting a fire on Shabbat, and so literally in the large hotels in Jerusalem, (the multi-story hotels) there will be a Shabbat elevator that will be pre-programmed to stop at every other floor, so that you can (without touching the buttons) you can ride in the elevator, get near your floor, and then you can take the stairs the rest of the way. No kindling of a fire and no harvesting.

Exodus 34:21 says, "You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; *even* during plowing time and harvest you shall rest." What was the penalty for breaking Shabbat? It was death; pretty serious to God. Exodus 31:14 says, "Therefore you are to observe Shabbat, for it is

holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.”

It was a very serious thing. You weren't to work. And by the way there's an example of it, (I won't turn there to it but) in Numbers 15:32 - 36, some guy is being disobedient to this command, and he's out gathering sticks in order to make a fire to do who knows what, but he's obviously flagrantly disobeying the clear commands of God, and he is put to death.

It was to be for two purposes. It was a day of worship with the people of God, Exodus 23 calls it a holy convocation, a holy assembly, a time when the people of God came together to worship, and it was also a welcome rest from the normal labors of life, and by the way, it was to be a delight. Many of the Jewish people, if you know them, can be very legalistic. Many Orthodox Jews do take a real delight in the Sabbath and in the Shabbat even to this day. It's not something they dread. It's a great delight to spend that time with family and not to have any of the other responsibilities of life than to worship God. That's the biblical perspective of Shabbat.

But you also need to know the Pharisaical perspective on Shabbat, what it had become to them to fully appreciate what was going on in the first century. Understand that there are two ceremonial activities that set the Jews apart from the nations: circumcision and the Sabbath. And so, the Mishnah which codified the interpretation of the rabbi's on the Old Testament, it was codified after the time of Christ, but the rules were in place before Christ and during Christ's time. It included a catalog of some 39 activities that were considered work and therefore forbidden on Shabbat. The idea was this; don't work on the Sabbath in any way unless it's necessary to save a life, and don't start anything on the day before Sabbath that would extend to the Sabbath.

And by the way, this got carried away as well, for example one of the rules was if you were a tailor, you sewed clothing for a living, you weren't to work on the Sabbath, that is you weren't to sew on the Sabbath. So in order to keep you from violating that, the Rabbi said what you need to do is not put a needle in your clothes on Friday. Because God forbid you have that needle in your clothes on Friday, you're carrying it with you then on Shabbat, you're working. So, it got carried away in legalism.

Now there were some reasonable prohibitions in the rabbi's teaching. Things that God Himself would have forbidden, things like plowing and hunting and butchering and harvesting. Those were all forbidden in this list of 39 things that were work. But there were also some unreasonable provisions as you might expect. For example (these are a couple of favorites),

tying or loosing knots. You didn't wear shoes that tied on Shabbat. Sewing more than one stitch, writing more than one letter, I don't know what use it would be to write one letter, but somebody thought that was a good thing. Setting a dislocated limb or repairing a fallen roof, by the way, you could prop up the roof, but you couldn't repair it.

The rabbi's tried to cover every base. This is probably the most outrageous example for me. They wrote this, I'm not making this up okay, this is what the rabbi's wrote. Essentially, they said this. If a building collapsed, you could only move enough rubble to determine if the victims were dead or alive. And if they were alive, then you could move enough rubble to rescue them, but if they had died the corpses had to be left there until the end of Shabbat. And this is the kind of thing they spelled out ad infinitum, ad nauseum. Of course, their list as you might expect, included reaping, threshing and the winnowing of grain.

But the Pharisees, with the best of motives, had set up fences to keep the people from breaking God's law. And so, in the end, here's where they landed. They said, the rabbi's, that to pluck heads of grain was equivalent to reaping. And that to rub out the grain was equivalent to threshing. And to blow away the chaff (wheew) from that grain you had just rubbed it away from was winnowing. Suddenly through their legalistic interpretation the disciples innocent little Sabbath snack, makes them guilty of breaking the Sabbath and liable to the death penalty. So that was the reason for their question. You can picture the horror on their face. How could You let Your disciples violate the Sabbath like that?

So that brings us then, we've seen the question that isn't a question, to the point they were making with Christ. Let's see the answer that can't be answered. Because Jesus answers their question with a series of arguments that are iron clad. And I want to walk through them with you together.

Jesus' argument, argument number 1. Jesus argues from biblical history. You see it in verses 25 and 26 as well as in the parallel passages. Here's what we read in verse 25,

“And He said to them, “Have you never read” (I love that.) [People who prided themselves on knowing, in many cases having memorized large portions of the Torah, Jesus says,] “you mean you haven't read what Jesus did when He was in need and He and His companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which

is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?”

He uses the example of David in 1 Samuel 21. In fact, turn back there for just a moment so you see the context of Jesus’ example. First Samuel 21, David is fleeing from Saul, and he comes to Nob which is a little town not too far from Jerusalem, and to Ahimelech the priest. Now don’t be bothered by the fact that it says he came to Ahimelech, and Jesus says Abiathar, the time of Abiathar. Some critics try to attack the Bible’s veracity because Abiathar wasn’t the high priest when this happened, Ahimelech was. But listen carefully, and I don’t want to spend a lot of time on this, but let me just tell you that there’s always a reasonable explanation, there is in this case as well. Abiathar was almost certainly present when this happened. He soon became high priest in place of Ahimelech, and he became the dominant high priest of that time, the one who was most known. And so, it was in the time of Abiathar. But it goes on to say,

“... [he] came trembling to meet David and said to him, “Why are you alone and no one with you?” David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, ‘Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.’”

Now David here is being deceitful, the Bible doesn’t comment on this deceit, but there is a lot of discussion about whether deceit in the time of war was acceptable or not, that’s not a discussion I’m getting into tonight. Verse 3,

“Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me [the] five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.” The priest answered David and said, “There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is the consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women.” David answered the priest and said to him, “Surely women have been kept from us as previously as when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels *be holy*?” [In other words, okay yeah that, we meet that qualification.] “So the priest gave him consecrated bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away.”

Now what's going on here? In the tabernacle, we're not yet to the temple, (Solomon builds the temple). In the tabernacle, just inside the Holy Place, not the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was, but the Holy Place where there was a small table. It was 3 feet long; it was about 18 inches wide, and it stood about 2 feet 3 inches high according to Exodus 25. This table was overlaid with gold, and on that table was always 12 loaves or cakes of unleavened bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The bread pictured the constant fellowship of the people of Israel with God.

Hendrickson writes, "The Israelites were guests at God's table." He was their sustainer. In Hebrew this bread is called the bread of the face or the bread of God's presence. It was before His face. Every Sabbath day the priests would put fresh bread on that table; 12 more loaves. And they were to take the 12 loaves that had been there all week and to eat them. And only the priests could eat them according to Leviticus 24. But in this case, it was all that Ahimelech had to offer David and his men as they fled from Saul, and so it was the Sabbath day. They had just removed those 12 loaves from the table there in the Holy Place, and Ahimelech gives David the bread. David and his friends take the bread and eat it to sustain themselves.

Here's Jesus' argument: it's the argument of necessity: Genuine necessity trumps strict adherence to the ceremonial law. That's what Jesus is saying, look at David. When there was a genuine need, even though the ceremonial law (by the way the key word here is ceremonial), necessity never trumps the moral law of God. It's never right to take God's name in vain; it's never right to have another God; it's never right to commit adultery; it's never right to steal. But when it comes to the ceremonial law, genuine necessity trumps strict adherence to the ceremonial law.

Let's move on to Jesus' second argument. It's from the Mosaic Law, and it doesn't come in Mark's gospel. It comes in the parallel account in Matthew's gospel. Matthew 12:5 says, Jesus added this, "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?" There were a lot of things the priests had to do on Shabbat. They had to make additional sacrifices. There were cleaning things that had to be done. The tabernacle, and later the temple, were essentially a glorified butcher shop where animal after animal was slain. There was much that had to be done, and the priests were allowed to work on Shabbat.

The argument is this: it's okay to work on the Sabbath in the case of God ordained ministry. The temple and its worship were greater than the Sabbath. And Jesus and His ministry (this is

the argument), were greater than both the temple and the Sabbath. So, it's okay for Him on His mission and His ministry with His disciples not to respect that requirement.

His third argument comes from the prophets, and it also is in Matthew's gospel. Matthew 12:7 says, "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would have not condemned the innocent."

This is a quotation from Hosea 6:6, and Jesus is essentially saying this to them. Listen, God's compassion for people is greater than the ceremonial law. You see this even in the ceremonial law, don't you? You remember the requirements were large animals for sacrifice, but if you were too poor to afford those large animals you could bring birds, fowl. You see God's compassion for people, for their need. God's compassion for people is greater than the ceremonial law.

There's a fourth argument Jesus uses, and that's from the very purpose of the Sabbath itself. This is in Mark 2:27. "Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

The argument is: listen God created the Sabbath as a blessing and a benefit to man. God didn't make man so that there would be somebody to keep the Sabbath. The Pharisees had made the Sabbath this sort of heavy oppressive load. They had forgotten that God had instituted the Sabbath to be an expression of His compassionate and provision for His creatures. D Edmond Hiebert writes this in his commentary, he says,

The institution of the Sabbath requiring a periodic day had been an inestimable boon to mankind. It was a gift that afforded man not only physical rest, but also refreshment in spirit in raising his thoughts above his daily labors. But the minute arbitrary regulations of the Pharisees made man a slave of the Sabbath, making its observance a burden rather than a blessing.

Jesus says that wasn't the purpose of the Sabbath, it was to be a blessing to people where they didn't have to work, where they could enjoy My creation, and God's people, and the worship of Me and their families.

Jesus' final argument comes from His own personal authority, look at verse 28: "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." This statement (especially in the Greek text) is shocking. Let

me give it to you in the word order from the Greek text. Listen to what Jesus says, “So [Lord Master Kurios] is the Son of Man ... even of the Sabbath.” What an incredible claim on the part of our Lord. Basically, you know what Christ was saying? I created the Sabbath. I have the right to define it and to determine how it should be kept. Kurios I am, even of the Sabbath, incredible responses of our Lord.

Now, what I want to do in the few minutes we have remaining is I want to talk about the application of these things to us. Jesus has taught us a lot here. Let’s see if we can synthesize out of it what we need to know.

First of all, a very clear application that draws out of this text is: Jesus’ use of the Scripture here underscores the importance of Scripture in deciding these kinds of issues and the necessity of reason and logic in comparing Scripture with Scripture in applying the Scripture. Jesus said, “Have you never read.” He didn’t mean they’d never read that text. To be a leader in Israel, they may have even memorized that text. His point was He was accusing them of failing to properly understand and apply the Scripture. It reminds us of how important it is to be careful with our treatment of the text of Scripture.

A second application is this: Jesus’ quotation of Hosea 6:6 underscores the priority of compassion in our lives. It’s not a an excuse for direct disobedience. You know some people will say well you know God loves me and so He’ll be happy if it’ll make me happy to have another spouse, even though I have no biblical grounds for divorce. That’s not what we’re talking about and if you want if you doubt that, then go back and read the story in Numbers 3:15 where the guys gathering wood on the Sabbath in direct disobedience to God’s command, and he’s stoned to death. Nevertheless, if your attitude of heart is to truly obey God, then where there is genuine human need, God understands and shows compassion.

Number three (and this is kind of the heart of where we’re going): Christians are not bound by the regulations of either the Old Testament Sabbath or quote, unquote the Christian Sabbath. Jesus said, “He was Lord of the Sabbath.” And He determines how it will be kept. So how then does Jesus command us through His apostles? What does He tell us to do? What about a Christian Sabbath? Well, there are two basic interpretations of this. One is that the Sabbath hasn’t changed at all. In that case it has to be what? Saturday, the seventh day, the day God rested from His creation. The other and really, it’s nobody but Seventh Day Adventists that would call themselves Christians that do that, I don’t believe. They’re very small segment, there’re maybe a couple of other groups that have Jewish backgrounds.

Most of the rest of Christians would say that Sabbath has changed, and they would say it's changed in one of two ways. Either they would say it's changed in the day only, and they would embrace a Christian Sabbath. In other words, it's exactly the same as the Old Testament just the day has changed, from Saturday to Sunday, or they would say, no the principle of the Sabbath the fact that time is to be set apart from work to worship God is still true, but the specific restrictions of the Sabbath no longer apply. If you can guess, this is where I am. Let's kind of walk through this and see if we can make a biblical defense for the Lord's Day.

It's clear that Christians are to set aside time on the first day of the week to worship, there's no question about that. You can see it several different ways. You can see that the early importance of Sunday, it was of course on that day that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. It was on that day (both the day of His resurrection and the following Sunday) when Jesus appeared six times to His disciples. Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit in that year because Passover of when Passover was on Friday, 50 days later would have put Pentecost on Sunday that year, so the amazing events of Pentecost happened on the first day of the week.

You see it in the pattern of the early church, in Acts 20 it says "on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread. Paul began talking to them intending to leave the next day." I love this, "and he prolonged his message until midnight." Now actually you can tell that it's clear this was an exception to the rule. However, a number of church historians make the note that it seems already at this point there was a regular weekly gathering of Christians on the first day of the week, typically in the evening because in a Jewish culture that was what? ... a workday. And for those who were who were influenced by the Jewish culture, who were God fearing Gentiles, and so therefore, you could only gather in the evening, and it's secondly clear that the teaching of the word of God was already a part of that early Christian worship as was the breaking of bread.

In First Corinthians 16, Paul tells the Corinthians,

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also." [So this is widespread in Macedonia, in Galatia.] "On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collection is to be made when I come."

Everything in that short section I just read points to the reality that they met on the first day of the week. They made collections on the first day of the week, and this was a widespread practice. And when Paul came, he intended to gather with them on the first day of the week, but he didn't want collections to be made on the day he was there. In Revelation 1:10 John writes, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet." A lot of ink has been spilled arguing on that point, but most historians agree that that is a reference to Sunday, that Sunday became (by the end of the first century) called the Lord's Day.

Is there a Christian Sabbath? Is, are we to treat Sunday in exactly the same way that Old Testament Jewish believers treated Saturday, the Sabbath? Well let me give you a couple of arguments to consider. First of all, the Sabbath command, the fourth commandment is the only one of the Ten Commandments that is not repeated and affirmed in the New Testament. Now, I think that's an argument to consider. I don't think an argument on silence is the strongest argument so I'm not going to stop there, but I think you ought to weigh that. I think the strongest argument comes in Colossians 2, turn there with me. Colossians 2:16, Paul writes,

"Therefore ..." [As a result of what Christ has accomplished] "... no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the ..." [the word] substance [is literally the word body; those things were a shadow, but the body] ... belongs to Christ." [It was like those things were the shadow of Christ cast across the Old Testament and now that the body is here, you don't want the shadow anymore.]

Now, the way those who believe in a Christian Sabbath will respond to this passage is, they'll say, well these are not the weekly Sabbaths, these are the special Sabbaths. You know the high Sabbaths when there was a Sabbath connected with one of the big festivals. Well, first of all, there's nothing in the text to indicate that. And I used to struggle with this because it is odd to me that this was one of the Ten Commandments. If it's one of those ten moral commandments, how could it go away? Well, the answer is this, when you look at how the Old Testament uses those three expressions that are here in Colossians 2:16: festival, new moon, Sabbath day. When those three expressions occur together in the Old Testament always, always, without exception, it's referring to the annual feast of Israel, the monthly new moon celebrations and the normal weekly Sabbaths, without exception. And so here, Paul uses that same expression, and he says,

“... no one then is to ... judge [you] in [respect] ... to ... [your keeping the annual feasts, the monthly new moon celebrations or the normal weekly Sabbaths.] ... [They were] a *mere* shadow ... [and the body is] Christ.” [That means that we are not required to celebrate a Christian Sabbath. The regulations of the Sabbath are not in place for us.]

It becomes then an issue of conscience as to how you practice Sunday. What is clear, and this I want to make very clear, is the day doesn't belong to you. It was intended from the beginning that our time was God's. Six days we were to work, and there was to be times set apart from the normal life to worship with God's people; folks that hasn't changed. It's the regulations and all of the thou shalt not do this and thou shalt do this that has changed. But the reality of worship with God's people hasn't changed. You remember what the writer of Hebrews says? “Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some.” We are required to gather with God's people for worship. What you do with the rest of Sunday is an issue of conscience between you and God.

Alright, let's move on quickly, one other thing, two other things. We also learned from this that Jesus is equal to God, because to claim to be the Kurios of the Sabbath was an unmistakable claim to deity. If you go back to when this command was uttered, it was uttered from God's mouth Himself. You remember in Exodus 20, God speaks from this flaming, cloud covered, earthquake-stricken mountain, and the people hear the voice of God, and God says, “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” And He sounded nothing like Charlton Heston, or, alright. And they heard it. It was the voice of God according to Deuteronomy 5 that they heard issue this command. To claim then to be the Lord of the Sabbath was an audacious claim if Jesus was not who He claimed to be. Lord is the Son of Man even of Shabbat. It was an audacious claim to be equal to God Himself.

The final lesson I want you to see is a beautiful one for us as Christians. The real significance of the Sabbath for us is that the Sabbath was a perfect picture of the spiritual rest our souls have found in Christ. Look at Hebrews 4. The writer of Hebrews uses the Sabbath as an illustration of what has happened to us. Look at Hebrews 4:1,

“Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering God's rest, any one of you may seem to come short of it. For indeed we've had the good news preached to us, just as they ...” [That is the children of Israel in the wilderness had also] “... but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not

united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed” [Here it is,] “we who have believed [in Christ] entered that rest just as He has said, “AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.”

[Now skip down to verse 8,] “... if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.” [In other words that wasn’t the real rest they needed.] Verse 9, “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” [Here’s the real significance of the Sabbath.] Verse 10, “For the one who [by faith] has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.”

What’s the writer of Hebrews saying? He’s saying this. There was this wonderful promise of rest from your labors, and he says let me tell you something, there’s a spiritual aspect of that; it wasn’t just about not doing your daily occupation. It was about the fact that you would enter a place where you were no longer working to secure the favor of God. Instead, you were entering the Sabbath rest where you stopped working to satisfy the demands of God and Christ Himself did it in our place. He became our Sabbath rest. And because He worked, and because He did everything God required, and because He satisfied the justice and wrath of God, you and I can enter the Sabbath rest where our souls no longer labor to satisfy the just demands of God, but instead, we rest from all our work, because Christ did it for us. That’s our Sabbath. We rest in Christ.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for Your wisdom in setting apart the time each week when we could gather to worship. But we thank You, oh God, that we are not prescribed with the same set of regulations as Your people in the Old Testament were. But rather we enjoy the freedom that we have in Christ.

But Lord, don’t let us take advantage of that freedom. Help us to stay committed to the priority of worship in our lives.

And Father, I pray most of all that there wouldn’t be anyone here tonight who would continue to work in some misguided effort to earn God’s favor, but instead, Father may they simply believe

in the gospel, believe in the good news that Jesus has done everything, and may they stop working and believe in the One who has worked for us so that they can enter the ultimate picture of the salvation we enjoy, the Sabbath rest. No more work to earn Your favor, but instead we rest in the One who earned it all.

We worship Him, our Lord and Savior, our Sabbath rest, and it's in His name we pray, Amen.